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W. M. Lea

SCENE ON THE BANKS OF THE ANA.

The morning of Boston's first Sacrament at Fallburgh

A. Fullarton & Co. London & Edinburgh.

U. P. Fathers.

SELECT SERMONS

BY

THOMAS BOSTON,

FIRST RELIEF MINISTER AT JEDBURGH,

AND

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FIRST RELIEF MINISTER AT EDINBURGH;

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

BY

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

THERE is a feeling in all men that they are sinners, a conviction that they have broken the law of God and are the objects of the divine displeasure. Much as man has fallen from that moral excellence which once surrounded him, as with a garment, it is not possible to obliterate all traces of his original grandeur. The temple which was once constructed by the Almighty to show forth his own glory is now in ruins, but the broken columns and mouldering remains prove the extent and magnificence of the building, before the hand of the spoiler was raised up against it, and it became an habitation of owls and of dragons. Man is conscious that he is not now in the position that he formerly occupied. He feels that he has sunk low from what he once was, and that he is far inferior to what he might yet be. He is dissatisfied with himself, and has the melancholy impression, that he has never yet known what true and abiding happiness is. Even in his deepest degradation, there are aspirations after good which he has never yet reached, and which he despairs ever now to realize. And as the shell, though carried far away from the sea, when applied to the ear still murmurs of the music of those distant waters which formed its native bed; so the human spirit has an instinctive yearning after that felicity which it originally enjoyed with God, and which can never again be experienced, until brought into communion with him. O the sad and pensive thoughts that a person must occa-

sionally feel, (if he dare think at all,) who knows that God is his enemy. "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." And then that dreary grave,—that cold shudder which freezes the warm blood at the idea of death!

"To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod."

And then the fear of something after death! the soul, what becomes of it? Is there an eternity of sorrow for the impenitent? Is there, after all, a hell for the ungodly, and shall its burning flames consume me for ever? Reflections and feelings like these will spring up occasionally, with every effort to avoid them, and rare is it to find a man, who has not experienced some conviction of sin, and who is not willing to acknowledge, that upon the ground of strict law and justice, he must perish, and that, without the mercy of God, there is no hope of salvation for him.

It is in a frame of mind like this, that the gospel meets us, and assures us, that full provision is made here for the supply of all the wants of our spiritual and immortal nature. The Holy Scriptures prove, in the most copious and conclusive manner, that Jesus Christ made a true and proper atonement for human guilt; that, in the strictest and most absolute sense of the terms, he died in the room of sinners; that his sacrifice was an ample satisfaction to the law which man had violated, and made it consistent with the perfections and government of Jehovah to pardon our transgressions, and to receive us into his favour. This atonement forms the grand distinction between Christianity and all other religions. We recognise no religion as of divine authority, which does not point to the cross, and say, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world!"

It being thus admitted, that the fount of our salvation is the atoning efficacy of Christ's death, and that without the agonies of his crucifixion, the whole human race would

have perished, a most important question next demands our attention. How are we to obtain an interest in the blessings of this sacrificial death, and what are the means, by which the benefit of his sufferings may be secured to us? A legacy of inestimable value has been bequeathed me, and what steps must I take to put myself in possession of it. The answer to this question marks the great distinction between a true and a false church. It is the more specific solution of the problem, "How shall man be just with God?" It is the boundary-line between a religion of truth, of hope, and of spirituality, and a religion of error, of fear, and of dead forms. It discriminates between a spirit of adoption and a spirit of bondage: and as has been well expressed in the memorable words of Luther, "It is the article of a falling or of a standing church." It is the declaration of Scripture, that "a man is justified by faith without the works of the law;" and whenever this principle is abandoned by a church, you may almost hear the thick rushing of the wings of cherubim, as in mournful accents they repeat, Let us depart hence. God is no longer in the midst of her. Her walls are no longer Salvation; nor her gates Praise.

What, then, are we to understand by Justification? It is a term borrowed from courts of law. A person who is justified is acquitted, and pronounced innocent. It is not necessary that we should enter into any formal proof, that Justification has a forensic meaning in Scripture, and that the idea intended to be conveyed is that of freeing a man from a charge which has been preferred against him, and of absolving him from condemnation. We regard it as so nearly self-evident, that Justification does not consist in making one just, but in declaring him to be just, and that the elements of a judicial proof are more or less understood in the whole process, that we will not enter upon an examination of the various texts which are brought forward, either for or against this opinion. An intelligent reader needs no other assistance in an inquiry of this nature, than a Bible and a Concordance.

A man is placed before an earthly tribunal charged with the commission of some offence. The trial proceeds, and, upon a strict examination into the facts of the case, his innocence is established beyond all possibility of doubt. The judge now pronounces him righteous, because he is proved to be righteous, and he is accordingly restored to all his rights and privileges. This may be styled a legal justification. His acquittal is a matter of right, not of favour, and he would be treated with injustice, if he were not absolved from condemnation. We too are arraigned before the bar of heaven, and we are accused with the commission of crimes that exceed all calculation. Our guilt is confirmed upon the clearest evidence, and we are informed, that our sins deserve eternal death; and yet mark the transcendent peculiarity of our case. In that same moment, we are absolved by the holy and impartial Judge from all guilt and punishment. We are justified, that is, we are declared to be righteous, and we are treated in all respects, as if we were perfectly innocent, and had broken no law either of God or of man. This may be called an evangelical justification as opposed to a legal one. In both cases the treatment is the same, and each party is considered innocent in the eye of the law, and receives all the benefits which flow from this happy condition. The ground of treatment is, however, different. The former is pronounced righteous, because he is personally righteous; the latter is pronounced righteous, though personally guilty, in consequence of the righteousness of Christ, imputed to him by faith. With regard to the former, the reward is entirely of merit: with regard to the latter, it is entirely of grace. The similarity in both cases, and it is this which we now insist upon, is that the judge does not make them just in the act of justification: he only declares them to be so, and treats them accordingly. His decision does not affect their moral character, and produce in them any excellence, of which before they were not the possessors. It is a mere external declaration, that the law holds them guiltless.

Simple as this distinction may appear, and clear as this doctrine is laid down in the Scriptures, it was at a very early period lost sight of, and justification was confounded with sanctification. Instead of being regarded as a pure forensic deed on the part of God, altering the relation which the sinner bore to the law, and freeing him from its malediction, justification was gradually considered as implying a real change of nature and an infusion of personal holiness. The merits of Christ procured for those who believe that grace which purified their hearts and made them conformable to the divine image: and this inherent righteousness forms the justification. The death and intercession of the Redeemer are doubtless the great meritorious causes, on account of which all grace and favour are conferred upon our race; but when we read in the Bible, that God justifies the ungodly, the meaning is, God sanctifies the ungodly, and by thus sanctifying him, receives him into his favour and pardons his past transgressions. The divine order is thus reversed. Holiness precedes pardon: pardon does not precede holiness.

Observe the consequences of the doctrine, that justification is contingent upon the actual righteousness wrought in us, by the Holy Spirit. According to this theory, a person when converted is justified by an infusion of righteousness into his soul. He is made holy by this imparted grace, and being thus acceptable to God, he receives the remission of all sins that were previously committed. He is now conformed to the divine image, and is entitled to say with the apostle of the Gentiles—"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?"—And were he to die at this moment, he would infallibly ascend to heaven. But how soon is this holy confidence destroyed! The first sin of which he is afterwards guilty removes him from the rock on which he was placed by divine grace, and he is again cast into the deep waters, where there is no standing. What means are now to be adopted, in order to wash away this new stain which has been contracted, for our justification

is no longer complete? Moreover, if justification be dependent upon an inherent righteousness, it is susceptible of degrees. In algebraic language, it is a variable quantity, whose value is determined by a number of previous conditions. It is susceptible at once of increase and diminution. It may range from zero to infinity: and exactly in proportion to the amount of any one's personal holiness will be his justification in the sight of God. Hence a man's sins may be partly forgiven, and partly not; hence the curse of a broken law may be partly remitted and partly not; and hence one may be partly the friend and partly the enemy of God. And how can the question be settled, at any given moment, between conversion and the grave? Is my soul now adorned with so much holiness, as to afford no shadow of doubt that I am completely justified in the sight of the immutable Jehovah? "How can I tell," said Dr. Samuel Johnson on his deathbed, when his friends were attempting to console his trembling spirit, by telling him of the good he had done to society by his writings, "how can I tell when I have done enough?" Who can answer this?

In order to form a correct estimate of this doctrine, and of its results, it should be viewed in connection with baptismal regeneration. The change effected at baptism is precisely the same as that which takes place at conversion. Baptism, we are told, becomes "our justification by the communication of an inward and mysterious gift." God is pleased, for the sake of his Son, to confer upon those who are baptized a justifying grace, which cleanses the soul from every blemish, and makes it as pure as that of Adam, when he came perfect from the hand of his Maker. At this instant then, the baptized person is free from all sin; he has received a complete justification, and were death to ensue, so soon as the rite is performed, heaven would be his everlasting portion. Baptismal regeneration is not our present topic, and it is introduced incidentally, for the purpose of extending the inferences that have already been made. Conversion and baptism introduce

their subjects into the same blessed condition: they are made perfectly holy by an infusion of holiness: they receive a justifying grace which renders them absolutely just, and hence the divine law has no more accusation against them, than it has upon the angels who have kept their first estate. But as the vast majority of persons born in Christendom are baptized in infancy, it follows that, with a few exceptions, the entire population have been completely justified in their earliest years, and delivered from all condemnation. What a precious privilege, some may imagine! Yes! but it is a privilege more in appearance than in reality. Make this blessing as valuable as you please, enlarge with all your eloquence on the benefit of thus being made a child of God, an heir of the kingdom of heaven, and set free from all original guilt, and from all previous transgression—of what avail is all this to me, when I am informed, that so soon as I have sinned, in thought or word or deed, I am dragged down from this eminence of favour, my boasted privilege of justification is no longer of service, and its deficiencies must henceforth be made up, by exertions of my own. Sins committed after the first justification have, we are told, such a peculiar aggravation, that though God, for his Son's sake, will pardon the guilt, he will not remit the punishment, and unless some satisfaction be made for them, other than that of Christ, we must perish without hope and without remedy. And from the prevalence of infant baptism, almost all are placed in this dreadful condition, that none of their actual transgressions can be forgiven through the efficacy of the Redeemer's death, and that some other atonement is required for their case, than that which was effected upon the cross, at Calvary, when "He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Verily, the Christians in the primitive church who held this doctrine were wiser in their generation, than their modern descendants, for, afraid of incurring the penalty of sins committed after their first

justification, they delayed their baptism as long as they possibly could.

Trivial as the error may appear of confounding justification with sanctification, and unimportant as it may seem at first sight, whether the justification of a sinner by God be a judicial or an effective act, it lies at the very foundation of man's hopes for eternity. It is an utter prostration of the gospel. It is the most cunning and the most fatal device which Satan has ever devised for the ruin of souls, in those lands that are favoured with the means of grace. It has paved the way for the grossest corruptions, and introduced a heathen morality and heathen superstitions into the church of the living God. It led men to trust to their own good deeds, for acceptance at the tribunal of heaven, that they might supplement that work which Jesus left incomplete, and thus cherished that pharisaical and haughty spirit, which of all others is most obnoxious to the immaculate Jehovah. And assuredly, if there was ever a doctrine the value of which has been shown by the lamentable consequences of deviating from it, it is so in the present instance. The whole history of the Christian church is an abundant illustration of it, and the thoughtful student, as he wanders through the darkness of the past ages, and mourns over the desolations of Zion, if perchance he should sit down upon a broken pillar, and inquire what is the meaning of all this? why has the holy city become the abode of creeping things, and been polluted with all manner of abomination? why has the glory departed, and Ichabod been inscribed upon every part? and why have not the banners of salvation waved triumphant over every land, and the wide world been converted unto God? No other response can be given than this—It is, "because they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, would not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God."

What evils has it not introduced? It gave urgency to

the inquiry, what means can be adopted to make satisfaction to God, for the sins committed between the first justification and death. It converted the simple and beautiful ordinance of the Lord's supper into a terrible mystery, into a true sacrifice for human guilt, the merit of which was applied to the souls of those who partook of it. It produced a system of penances, fastings, and mortifications, as if external filth and bodily tortures were an equivalent for the transgression of that law which demands truth in the inward parts, and as if God would be better pleased with a man for reducing himself nearly to the level of a beast, devoid of reason. It gave rise to the doctrine that abstinence from that marriage which is "honourable in all," is the highest style of excellence, and thus by exalting celibacy to heaven, gradually introduced a sensuality so foul and so revolting that it is questionable whether heathenism itself could furnish a parallel. It originated an appeal to the holiness of martyrs, whose surplus merits might be advantageously appropriated to make up the deficiencies of the living. It kindled the fires of purgatory, where crimes committed in this life might be burned and purged away. It taught men to put their confidence in masses and indulgences and lighted candles, and ringing of bells, and rags and rotten bones, instead of leading them to trust in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Him who came into our world, mighty to save, and of whom Eternal Wisdom has declared: "neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."

What a blessed event then was the Reformation, when God raised up Luther with the spirit and power of Elijah "to turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." This son of a poor German miner saw more clearly than any other man since the Apostle Paul, the importance of the doctrine, that justification is a forensic act, that it is the act of a judge, that it does not consist in making a sinner just, but in pronouncing him to be just, and treating him accordingly.

Little did he at first imagine the might that slumbered in these few and simple words, "The just shall live by faith," which stirred up the depths of his moral nature, and introduced him to a new world of spiritual realities. By the proclamation of this vital truth, which for ages had been well nigh buried in the grave, he pulled down the strongholds of error and superstition, consecrated as they were with a hoary antiquity and defended by all the arguments of a selfish and worldly policy. He set free the imprisoned pages of the Bible, and the truth as it is in Jesus again walked abroad upon the earth, in her undying beauty and strength. The soul was emancipated from the bondage of Sinai, and the trammels of an impure priesthood, and man fled at once to the inexhaustible merits of the divine atonement, and found all his wants supplied; he held direct communion with his God, called him Father, and rejoiced in the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free.

It is matter of deep regret, that even in some Protestant churches, the error is still more or less prevalent of confounding justification with sanctification. It is impossible to read the works of Butler, Jeremy Taylor and others of this class of divines in the Anglican church, without perceiving this confusion of idea, and how much it obscures their views of divine truth. It hides the glory of the gospel, that God justifies the ungodly, and that our salvation from first to last is one of free grace; and though employed by them as an argument for an intense and burning holiness, the object aimed at is defeated, because the soul is thus shut out from the only source, whence a true spirituality of heart can proceed. And it invariably leads to the same conclusion we have been condemning, that the whole work of our salvation was not effected upon Calvary's cross; that the death of Christ so far removed the obstacles which impeded our recovery, that by divine grace we are placed in circumstances to save ourselves; and that certain things are requisite on our part, as well as faith in the Lord Jesus, before the pardon of our sins can be ob-

tained. It is by the combined value of the atonement and of our own exertions; it is by this union of divine and human merits, that we find acceptance with the Most High, and receive a title to eternal life. And this can never be established, without having recourse to the hypothesis, that the original law of perfection is abrogated, and a mitigated law put in its stead: or to express the same thought, in more common language, that God will now be pleased, for the sake of Christ, to accept of sincere though imperfect obedience.

This Pelagian tendency which in the Roman Catholic church leads to fastings and mortifications, to a material piety and external morality, is generally developed in the Protestant church, in the form of sheer carelessness to all religion. The human soul, when no longer bound to God by that loving gratitude which springs from the consciousness of a free pardon, degenerates either into a dead formalism or a callous indifference, if not a positive infidelity. Scotland experienced this disastrous result, during the former half of the last century. The stream of doctrinal error flowed northward from England. A want of reverence for sacred things began to characterize the upper classes. It was considered genteel and philosophical, and a mark of mental superiority to avow infidel principles, and a person, who proclaimed his adhesion to the doctrines of the cross placed in no small hazard his character for intellect and learning. The pulpit shared in the general corruption, for alas! the springs were poisoned at their source. It became apologetic, not dogmatic. It was very apprehensive of the offence of the cross. It kept in the back ground the supernatural element, and gave such prominence to the rationalistic, that there was not much room left for choice between a refined deism and such an emasculated Christianity. It was in these circumstances of declension, when low views of human sin and of the divine law, of Christ's person and of Christ's work were proclaimed so extensively from the pulpits of the National church, that it was given to the Founders and Fathers of the United Presby-

terian Church to hold up again to the church that great truth which had been dragged from the obscurity of ages by the German reformer, about two centuries before, that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law. They saw clearly the importance of the distinction between justification and sanctification, and how much all other doctrines which tend to humble man and to exalt God are bound up with it. It was engraven upon their heart, and the principle of it pervaded all their ministrations, whether addressing believers or unbelievers, that the justification of the ungodly does not consist in making him holy, but in pronouncing him to be so, and conferring upon him the benefits of holiness. They offered a free, present, and an eternal salvation founded upon the finished work, the perfect righteousness of Immanuel, and great was their success, for the hand of God was with them. He breathed upon them his Spirit, and their teaching was as life from the dead. Sinners were rescued from the wrath to come, religion revived in the hearts of many, and "then had the churches rest and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." And it is to this church, more than to any other human instrumentality—to its resolute opposition to error, and its unwavering attachment to the truth of God, that Scotland is indebted for that high place she occupies among the nations of the earth, for that manly piety, that reverence for the Sabbath, that sternness of principle, that intellectual vigour, and indomitable perseverance which characterises her sons and her daughters, and makes her name a loved one and an honoured, wherever it is known.

Justification then, as we have seen, consists in absolution from the sentence of condemnation—the soul that sinneth, it shall die. The law has no more power to convict: its curse has been removed by the righteous Legislator, and who has a right to condemn those whom God has received into his favour, and pronounced free from the penalty of transgression? The justified man, though personally unholy,

is treated as if he were perfectly holy, as if no throbbing of impure desire had ever stained his mind, and as if he had kept his allegiance, with the same integrity, as the angels who are now around the throne. His condition is henceforth completely changed. He is brought from a state of nature to a state of grace, from a state of alienation to a state of favour. He is removed from the curse of the old covenant, and placed under the blessing of the new. He is no longer an heir of hell, but an heir of heaven. His connection with the first Adam is dissolved for ever, and he has formed a perpetual union with the second, who is the Lord from heaven: and we are assured, from the highest authority, that "there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." And are we wrong in drawing the conclusion, that when God writes, there is no condemnation, he means, there is all salvation, a full and complete salvation?

Justification is thus a single act. It is not a series of acts, varying according to times and circumstances. A person is not justified one day, condemned upon a second, and justified again, upon a third. Those who are once justified shall never be condemned. It is an irreversible deed, and like the atoning sacrifice of Emmanuel requires no repetition. The believer when justified is placed in a condition, where ample provision is made for all his spiritual wants. A channel of communication is then opened up between him and his Living Head in heaven, from whom he receives grace and strength, proportioned to his need; for if any believer sin, through the imperfection of his character and the pressure of temptation, he is not to despair, for "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." If we conceive aright of God's character, it appears impossible that he will finally condemn to perdition those whom he has once justified and pronounced righteous, for thus runs the golden chain of salvation, stretching from eternity to eternity, "Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and

whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

An objection has been sometimes taken to the dogmatic proposition, that God looks upon a justified person, as if he were completely righteous, and treats him as such. It is affirmed that this statement is not true, as a matter of fact. It is said, affliction, disease and death are the results of sin, but believers are subject to them as well as others, and how then can it be contended that the Sovereign of the universe acts towards them, as if they had been guilty of no transgression? It is obvious, that this question introduces us to a wide field of inquiry, and it is equally clear that God could not act otherwise than he does, towards his people, without making a thorough change in the principles, upon which the moral government of our planet is conducted. One of two plans might have been adopted. *First*, The moment a person was justified, he might be removed to heaven without the process of death. In this case, no church could exist upon earth, the influence of good men upon society would be completely lost, human agency could no longer be employed in the conversion of sinners to God, and the whole world would be altogether abandoned to the control of the wicked. Would this be an improvement upon the present constitution of things! Or *Second*, When a person was justified, God might bestow upon him a charmed existence. All his worldly circumstances might be prosperous: his mind might suffer no pang, from the distresses and bereavements of friends: his body might be preserved from disease and decay, and remain in youthful vigour and beauty, and when the period of his duration upon earth came to a close, he might be borne aloft, like the prophet of old, upon a chariot of fire and horses of fire. Would this miraculous distinction between saints and sinners, exemplified in the minutest transactions, and at every moment of their lives, subserve the purposes of God, in the moral government he has established upon earth? We think not. But without entering upon this extensive subject, and without presuming to scruti-

nize too curiously the principles of the divine administration, we may still give a general answer to the question proposed. It might be replied, (1.) that the language found fault with is quite in accordance with many portions of scripture. (2.) That justification does not consist in a personal but in a relative holiness. (3.) That though the man justified is invariably made holy, the work of sanctification is never completed upon earth. (4.) That afflictions in the case of believers lose their character, they are not punishments but chastisements. They are the effects of divine love, become positive blessings, burnish into greater splendour the graces of the renewed mind,—and prepare for higher honour in the celestial state. And (5.) An answer may be given in the words of Paul, who is evidently anticipating this objection, “If Christ be in you, the body is dead, because of sin; but the spirit is life, because of righteousness,”—that is, though the body be subject to death, as the punishment of sin, the spirit of the Christian is life, is happiness, as the reward of righteousness. And he adds, as a ground of consolation, respecting even this frail mortal frame, that it shall hereafter be fashioned into immortal beauty and strength, “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you; he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

A question has been agitated—Is forgiveness of sin, the whole or only a part of our justification? Is it limited to a mere absolution from the penalty, or does it also include the imputation of righteousness? It is not a little surprising, that any controversy should exist upon this subject, among Protestant divines.—It is argued by one class, that pardon and forgiveness and justification are equivalent terms, and an appeal is made to the commencement of the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, where non-imputation of sin is described as being the same as imputation of righteousness. It is affirmed by them, that the technical distinction is useless and ought to be abandoned. The absence of disease is health; the absence of misery

is joy; the absence of darkness is light, and the absence of sin is holiness. This reasoning, however, appears more specious than solid. It might be conceded to them, that the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness are not two parts of justification, and yet it would certainly not be denied that justification admits of a twofold aspect; and that though the removal of the curse may be the same thing as the bestowment of the blessing, it may be convenient for our minds to consider it at one time, in a negative, and at another in a positive form. It is argued by the other class of divines, that the distinction for which they contend is founded in the nature of things. Deliverance from the penalty of the law is not the same act, as conferring the rewards of obedience. It is one thing to pardon a criminal, and another to make him your intimate friend. It is one thing to set a slave free, and another to adopt him as your son and bequeath him a large estate. It is one thing to bring Joseph from the dungeon, and another to make him the prime minister of Egypt. It is one thing to rescue a sinner from hell, and another to exalt him to a throne in heaven. It is argued also, that the Scriptures sanction the twofold distinction. It is declared by John, that believers are not only washed from their sins in the blood of Jesus, but are made kings and priests unto God. It is asserted by Paul, that the object of Christ's mission was not only to redeem them that were under the law, but to confer upon them the adoption of sons. It is affirmed by our Lord himself, when he gave Paul his commission as an apostle, that he was sent to the Gentiles not only "that they may receive forgiveness of sins, but also an inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith in Christ." They argue from these considerations, that they are fully authorised in making this distinction between the pardon of sins, and acceptance as righteous. It is more than probable that this dispute among theologians would soon come to a termination, if the ground of pardon were more accurately and carefully kept before the mind. What is the ground of pardon? It is the righteousness of

Christ. It is by God accepting us as righteous for his Son's sake, that we obtain the remission of our sins. We are not first pardoned, and then accepted as righteous; but it is by the imputation of a divine and spotless righteousness, that our iniquity is cancelled for ever.

N. M.

DUNFERMLINE.



SERMONS

BY THE

REV. THOMAS BOSTON.

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SERMON I.

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED.*

1 COR. ii. 2.—“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

IN the preceding words, the Apostle begins a vindication of the manner of his preaching, which he says “was not with excellency of speech or of wisdom.” And ver. 4th, he adds, “My speech and my preaching was not with the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power.” It appears there were in his days, as there are in ours, many who greatly admired a fine style; not so much regarding the subject-matter of a sermon, as the preacher’s language and manner of address. Of this sort were they who had been instructed in the Platonic philosophy before their conversion to Christianity, and were for introducing among the preachers of that religion, what they called *Plato’s gracious manner*. The Apostle frequently in his epistles declares against this piece of vanity, as very much below the dignity of the Gospel. He did not study pompous words curiously arranged, and rhetorical harangues, or nicely adjusted periods, to tickle the ear and please the fancy of those who pretended to a refined and polite taste in these matters. And the reason for this

* Preached October 22d, 1761, at Colinsburgh, Fifeshire, upon the admission of the Rev. Mr. Thomas Collier to the exercise of the holy ministry there. This discourse has a historical value, independent of its intrinsic worth. It was upon this day, and in this place, that the Relief Presbytery was formed.

part of his conduct is assigned in the text; *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

In which words, two things are observable :

1. The subject-matter of Paul's preaching, namely, Jesus Christ. *I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ.* This surely is not to be understood as if the Apostle simply condemned all other knowledge but that of Jesus Christ. We find the Holy Ghost has recorded it to the honour of Moses, "that he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Besides, Paul himself had a very liberal education before his conversion, being bred up at the feet of Gamaliel an eminent doctor of the law. Yea, he was not only acquainted with the Jewish laws, rites, and traditions, but likewise with the heathen poets and philosophers, as appears by passages quoted from them in his writings. However, he condemns all sorts of knowledge, in so far as they come in competition with, or stand in opposition to, the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Neither was this a warm flight of devotion, or a thought that suddenly struck the man; but the effect of the most attentive consideration, the result of the most deliberate and serious inquiry. So much is imported in what is here rendered *determined*. It is as if he had said, "I have well weighed the case, I have turned it round, and balanced advantages and disadvantages, gains and losses;—I have endeavoured to take in every thing that merits consideration here, and, after the most serious, deliberate, and impartial scrutiny, this is my settled opinion, my fixed sentiment, that no knowledge whatsoever is worthy to be once named with the knowledge of 'Jesus Christ my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung,' (or dog's meat, as the Greek word imports) 'that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'" Phil. iii. 8, 9.

Now, this being the great Apostle's judgment, we need

not wonder that he determined to know nothing, *i. e.* to make nothing known among the people, but Jesus Christ. This excellent, this matchless One, should be the subject of all his sermons, discourses, and epistles. He would study first to know Christ for himself, and then to make him known unto the people, hereby setting an example to ministers of the gospel in all succeeding ages, that they should first be Christians, and then ministers; and further, that, however well they may be accomplished in the several parts of human learning, yet in their pulpit-ministrations, they should display nothing but the glory, the love, and the laws of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the mean appointed of God for the salvation of sinners; and though it be esteemed foolishness by the *willings* of the world, we may rest satisfied in this, that the only wise God knows very well how to adapt the means to the end.

2. The special consideration of Christ which he singles out from among all the rest, to be the subject of his preaching, namely, *Christ crucified*. It is not Christ risen, Christ ascended, and sitting at the right-hand of God, clothed with all power, that he pitches on, though these views of him were more likely to have recommended him to the world: but, behold! he singles out that very circumstance concerning Christ, which, of all others, neither Jews nor Gentiles were able to endure; and that was, his being nailed to a cross till he died! "Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." And, indeed, he was so to Paul himself, as much as to any man, before his conversion; for he was, by his own acknowledgment, "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious." Nay, we find the disciples could not bear the intimation of Christ's death when it was made to them by himself: Peter remonstrates against it vigorously. The truth is, these good men laboured under the prejudices of a Jewish education; and they never awaked fully out of the dream of a temporal kingdom, until the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came down upon them, and cleared up the mystery of the cross unto them: and then,

indeed, they went forth with boldness, boasting and glorying in that very thing which the world thought a badge of shame and infamy.

And now, methinks, this determination of the most famous preacher and apostle of the Gentiles furnishes us with a lesson very suitable to the occasion of our meeting here this day, namely, "That the doctrine of Christ crucified, is that which ministers of the gospel should chiefly study to know and to make known among the people."

In discoursing further on this subject, we propose, through divine assistance, first, to consider what is that knowledge of Christ crucified which ministers of the gospel ought to have. Secondly, to show how ministers of the gospel should make Christ known among the people. Thirdly, to point out, in some particulars, the excellency of the knowledge of Christ crucified above all other knowledge whatsoever.

I. As to the first thing proposed, *viz.* what is that knowledge of Christ crucified, which ministers of the gospel ought to have? we say,

1. All Christians, but especially ministers of the gospel, ought to have the speculative knowledge of Christ crucified, as by their office they are bound to make him known unto others. They should be "scribes well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, and able to bring forth out of their treasure things new and old." They should know and understand the evidences of the Christian religion, and likewise the particular doctrines and duties thereof; that so they may be able not only to instruct the weak and ignorant, but also to defend Christianity against the attacks of deists and infidels, and all other enemies of the truth, as it is in Jesus.

Now, as he who would be master of any art or science, will choose to read the best book written thereon; so those who desire to make proficiency in the knowledge of Christ, would by all means study the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments;—these, my brethren, are the grand charter of our salvation, and they are sealed by the blood

of our Saviour.—This same Jesus is, as it were, the *running-title* of the whole Bible. All the prophets spoke of him; all the priests in their sacred services were types of him, and pointed towards him.—Judaism was Christianity under a veil, as Christianity is Judaism unveiled. Therefore the Old Testament ought to be carefully studied by ministers of the gospel, as well as the New; forasmuch as Christ is the scope and substance thereof. And for the better understanding of both Testaments, it is quite necessary they should be acquainted with the original languages in which they were written. The strength and beauty of many passages in the Old Testament, and even the true sense of some of them, cannot be discerned by such as are utterly unacquainted with the Hebrew language. And I cannot but take notice of it, as what deserves to be regretted, that the study of that language has gone so much into desuetude in this nation, and even among the clergy, whose office it is to explain the Scriptures unto the people, and who ought therefore to be furnished with every thing necessary for their own understanding of them. But we have some ground to hope, that this error may, in process of time, be rectified, as there appears a greater inclination for that study, both in this and in the neighbouring nation, than heretofore.

Ministers of the gospel ought, like Apollos, to be mighty in the Scriptures. *Bonus theologus, bonus textuarius*, was the saying of old. They should read them regularly, frequently, and with great attention, and thereby they will be furnished with a better fund for preaching Christianity, than by reading any other book, or all other books whatsoever that have been written on the subject, though these also are very useful in their proper place.

2. They ought also to have the experimental and practical knowledge of Christ crucified; lest, while they preach him to others, they may themselves be *cast-aways*, as the apostle's phrase is. The most precious truths fluctuating in the head, but not descending into the heart, or sanctifying it, prove no better than the manna of old, which when

kept over night, stank and bred worms: however distinctly we apprehend evangelical truths, yet if they are unmixed with faith, and undigested by practice, they will breed the noxious humours and crudities of pride, self-conceit, hypocrisy, and profaneness.

Real religion, my brethren, does by no means consist in the merely speculative knowledge of its truths; otherwise, the devils themselves would have more religion than the best of us: for albeit they have lost their purity and holiness, we have no ground to think they have lost their knowledge and sagacity. The Scripture saith, "They believe and tremble," James ii. 19., which implies their knowledge. As for carnal unregenerated men, whatever be their abilities, natural or acquired, they know Christianity only in a book; whereas real Christians have felt the exceeding greatness of its power: they have such ideas and such impressions of spiritual things made upon their minds by the Holy Ghost, as the natural man knows not at all.

Suppose the picture of a man drawn as lively, and as near to the original as possible, yet they who have seen the man himself, and conversed with him, will have another sort of idea of him than those possibly can have, who never saw him but in the picture. A man who has read geography, may describe the complexion, religion, laws, customs, commodities, and curiosities of different countries which he never dwelt in, nor travelled through: but the man who has lived in those countries, and seen all these things with his eyes, and often conversed with the inhabitants, must have an idea and impression of them, which the man, who has only read or heard of them, knows nothing about.

How necessary then is the experimental knowledge of Christ to ministers of the gospel! Let them have the richest cargo of gifts and learning you can suppose, yet, without this, they are but very poorly furnished for their office, and the discharge of it is more likely to be the drudgery of their lives, than the delight of their souls.

A preacher of Christ, yet not a believer in Christ! a minister of Christ, yet a servant of sin! what monstrous connections are these? "Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?" Rom. ii. 21. In short, those who preach Christianity, without real and saving impressions of it upon their own hearts, are no better than actors upon a stage where a villain often personates the most virtuous character, and where all is mere fiction. But,

II. I proceed to the second thing in our method, *viz.* to show how ministers of the gospel should make Christ crucified known among the people.

1. They should make him known by preaching. To this purpose the revered apostle of the Gentiles tells us, "After that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God," 1 Cor. i. 21—23. And in another place, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord," &c.; 2 Cor. iv. 5. True it is, we are not *apostles*; this high title belongs not to those who are now ministers of the gospel: for they have neither the call, nor the qualifications, nor the charge of apostles. Neither had the apostles any successors in their office properly so called. At the same time, Jesus Christ certainly designed there should be a set of men successively, whose office it would be to teach and preach his religion to the end of time. And as such an institution seems founded on common sense and reason, and upon the universal practice of mankind in reference to religion, so it seems to be very plainly intimated by our Saviour himself before his ascension, when he says to his disciples, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,—teaching them to observe all things what-

soever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. We all know these good men lived but a short while in the world: however, the promise originally made to them, extends to faithful ministers of the gospel in their several generations, to the end of time. Therefore, whatever be pretended, it appears to me a very unfriendly office to Jesus Christ and his religion, to depreciate a public ministry:—It is an attempt to blast what the Lord has most certainly blessed in all ages to the conversion of souls.

But then, ministers of Christ must be preachers of Christ; they should make him known among the people, by preaching his *doctrines*, his *institutions*, and his *laws* and *commandments*. Under these three, I conceive, what is called *preaching of Christ* may be comprehended.

Ministers should lay before their people the evidences of the truth of Christianity in a way suited unto their capacities, that so they may be able to give a reason of the hope that is in them, and be fortified against the attacks of deists and infidels, who abound every where in this degenerate age. However, they ought not to insist always upon these, but to open up the particular doctrines of Christianity, such as concern the person, natures, offices, and grace of the Lord Jesus. They should endeavour to convince sinners of their lost state by nature, their absolute inability to recover themselves, and the indispensable necessity of coming to Jesus Christ as the one and only Mediator betwixt God and man. And, in order to obtain this good end, the law must be preached, its threatenings and curses must be sounded loud in the ears of sinners;—they must be alarmed with the thunder and fire from Mount Sinai: "for the law is our schoolmaster to bring us in to Christ." They should open up that grand transaction betwixt God the Father and God the Son, in behalf of mankind sinners, called *the covenant of grace*, with all the blessings and benefits contained therein, as effectual calling, justification, adoption, regeneration, sanctification, the in-

habitation of the Spirit, perseverance in grace, and the heavenly kingdom.

Farther, ministers of the gospel should declare the ordinances and institutions of Christ. Our Lord's last words, when he was leaving the world, were, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," &c. The positive institutions of Christianity, for all the clamour and noise that have been made about them by infidels, are but few in number, and of easy observance, especially when compared with the ritual of the Jewish church, once of divine institution, and which the apostle Peter calls "a yoke that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear."

But then, ministers of the gospel must preach the laws and commandments of Christ. Hence we find the great Apostle of the Gentiles, in his epistles, always subjoins unto the doctrines of free grace, (which he had a particular talent of displaying,) the warmest exhortations to piety, holiness, and righteousness in their several branches. For he well knew how prone corrupt nature is to divorce comfort from duty, and to turn the grace of God into wantonness.

The gospel is "a doctrine according to godliness," it is a most holy gospel; and where it appears, it "teaches to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise," the gospel of Christ commands us to "think on these things," Titus ii. 11, 12; Phil. iv. 8.

Therefore, when ministers declaim against vice, either in general, or more particularly;—when they inculcate the duties of sobriety, righteousness, and charity, the people must not call it legal preaching, or not preaching Christ; for he who preaches *the laws of Christ*, preaches Christ, as well as he who preaches *the love of Christ*. But then faithful preachers of the gospel, in urging duty and obedience upon

the people, will be sure to remind them of their utter insufficiency of themselves for so much as a good thought, and the necessity of an entire dependence upon the Spirit and grace of the Lord Jesus, for assistance and acceptance in every good work. When these things are duly observed, duty cannot be too much urged; but the pressing of duty without them is a most criminal neglect of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and a piece of cruelty to poor sinners; while they are craved hard, as by an Egyptian task-master, for duty and service, and nothing afforded them wherewith to pay.

2. Ministers should make Christ known among their people by the ordinance of catechising. In the primitive church, catechising was very much the work of their pastors, and many were set apart for that very purpose. Before persons were admitted into full communion with the church, they were, by catechising, instructed in the principles of the Christian religion; and, till such time as they were judged fit to partake of the holy sacrament, they were called *Catechumens*.

The apostle Paul recommends it to the Galatians to give all due encouragement unto those who laboured in the work of catechising among them. "Let him that is taught in the word,"—according to the original, it is, "Let him that is catechised in the word, communicate unto him that catechiseth, in all good things," Gal. vi. 6. Several great and worthy men, both in the earlier and later periods of the church, have employed much of their time in this sort of exercise among the people, and have found it exceedingly profitable unto them. And I apprehend, the knowledge of the principles of religion, which generally obtains amongst the people of Scotland is, in a good measure, owing to the laudable custom of catechising practised by their ministers, whereas, in the countries where it is neglected, the poorer classes are, for the most part, grossly ignorant.

Sermons are addressed to a whole assembly, and by far the greatest number of the audience, they are very little

attended unto. Besides, the subject of a sermon is probably but one single point or doctrine of Christianity, whereas, at a diet of catechising, one may hear the principal doctrines of the whole system opened up; and the attention of the people is better kept up, when they are particularly called upon to give the reasons of their faith and hope.

Let us, then, who are ministers, carefully discharge our duty in this particular, especially among the younger sort; and, through the divine blessing, it will have very good effects.

3. Ministers should make Christ known among their people by occasional instruction, exhortation, consolation, and reproof. Let us hear Paul's awful charge to his son Timothy:—"I charge thee, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead, at his appearing and his kingdom."—Strange! what must that be which the apostle charges with such an awful solemnity?—"Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine," 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2. Ministers should have a deep sense and impression of the weight of their work always abiding upon their spirits, as also a tender concern for the state of their flock; and then they will readily embrace every opportunity of promoting their edification in faith and holiness. Besides the stated and constant parts of the ministerial work, which should be diligently attended unto, a faithful minister will find several occasions of dealing with particular persons, for their conviction in case of offence, for their direction in difficulties, for their clearance in doubts, or for their comfort in distress. And the word, thus particularly applied by one having "the tongue of the learned to speak a word in season," has often been blessed with remarkable success.

4. Ministers should make Christ known among their people by exemplifying his life in their own lives. Paul tells the Thessalonians,—“Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe,” 1 Thess. ii. 10. Mankind have,

in all ages, been more easily influenced by example than by precept. And this is thought to be one reason why the heathen philosophers had so little success in reforming the world, *viz.* that many of them practised those very vices in their lives, which they declaimed against in their public lectures. Therefore ministers of the gospel, above all men, should be careful to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour” by their holy works; they should not give the least countenance to the vices, vanities, and follies of the age. In any company where they happen to mix, they should speak and act in a suitableness to their sacred and venerable character;—they should be as so many living Bibles scattered up and down the Christian world, “that they who know not the word, may also, without the word, be won” by their holy and exemplary conversation, 1 Peter iii. 1.

It was said of one of the ministers of the primitive church, that he thundered in his doctrine, and lightened in his life. And a greater than he was called “a burning and a shining light,” *viz.* John Baptist. He called himself, in his great humility, *a voice*;—“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” A voice! the lowest of entities, which owes its very being to the breath of the speaker. And, indeed, he was all a voice;—a voice in his habit, a voice in his diet, and a voice in his conversation. If, then, we who are ministers, would commend Christ and his religion to the people, let us walk before them as he also walked; and thus we will preach to them by our lives, as well as by our lips.

III. I proceed now to the third thing proposed, *viz.* To point out the excellency of the knowledge of Christ crucified above all other knowledge whatsoever. On this head, I offer the following particulars:—

1. The knowledge of Christ crucified excels all other knowledge in point of certainty. That such a person as Jesus of Nazareth appeared in Judea, in the reign of Tiberius, is agreed to by all. The birth of this person, his

manner of life, his doctrine, and his death, exactly correspond with the prophetic accounts of the Messiah to be found in the ancient Jewish records. He proved himself to be the same Messiah, the Son of God, and a divine person, by his doctrine, and by a series of incontestable miracles, not done in a corner, or some small inconsiderable village, but done in Jerusalem, the capital of the nation; and not before friends only, or a select number of witnesses, but publicly, in the presence of thousands, the most of whom were his bitterest adversaries, and had all the inclination imaginable to disprove them, had it been in their power. After they had murdered him, and laid him in his grave, under a triple security, the stone, the seal, and the watch, yet, according to his own prediction, he rose the third day after his death. He did not indeed appear publicly before the Jewish nation after his resurrection, as he had done before his death: but the whole college of the apostles, men of sufficient abilities for discerning, men of untainted candour and integrity, go to death, one after another, maintaining the same thing, *viz.* that they saw with their eyes Jesus of Nazareth alive; that they ate, and drank, and conversed familiarly with him, for no less than forty days after he had been both dead and buried. Thus the resurrection of Christ, upon which the whole of Christianity depends, stands upon the most undoubted evidence. Now, my brethren, besides the external evidence for the truth of Christianity, arising from miracles and prophecies, which the acutest adversaries have not yet been able to disprove; real believers have the inward witness of the Spirit of God, convincing them of the truth of Christianity, with a certainty beyond all the moral suasions or mathematical demonstrations in the world.

2. The knowledge of Christ crucified excels all other knowledge in point of easiness and plainness. How difficult is it to get any tolerable insight into most of the sciences! how much time is necessarily spent in the very rudiments and elements of them! and all this is but an introduction

into them. How many years may a man live, and study hard too, and yet make but small progress in the knowledge of natural philosophy? He may know much in respect of others who are ignorant in these matters, and yet know but very little in comparison of what yet remains to be discovered in the vast continent of nature.

The honourable Mr. Boyle, a great searcher into nature, a profound philosopher, and, at the same time, *altogether a Christian*, affirms, that the shortness of man's life makes it impossible for him to understand thoroughly any one thing in nature. Besides, it is not the bulk of mankind, nay, it is only a few of them, that have capacity or opportunity for philosophical inquiries. But Christianity being designed for the benefit of mankind at large, it is plain and easy, and calculated for the weakest capacity, so that people of humble life, and of little penetration, may make great proficiency therein. It is true, indeed, there are in the Scriptures things hard to be understood, difficulties that exercise the judgment of the greatest scholars; but, then, these are remote from the essentials of Christianity, and people may remain ignorant of them without endangering their eternal salvation; whereas, the things absolutely necessary to be known are expressed in such plain terms, that he who runs may read them. There are, in the Scriptures, shallow places where lambs may wade, as well as depths where elephants may swim: and while learned men *and disputers of this world* contend about chronological difficulties, or critical niceties, the meanest and weakest of the household of faith may rest satisfied, yea, be full of joy, while they know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

3. The knowledge of Christ crucified excels all other knowledge in point of sublimity. Hence, the Christian joins issue with the devout Psalmist, crying, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," Psalm cxix. 18. What is the knowledge of languages, of arts and sciences? what is the knowledge of nature or of mankind, when compared with the knowledge

of "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them?" The whole system of nature, which contains so many admirable curiosities, was designed chiefly as a theatre to display the revealed system upon, for a while, and therefore, must be as far inferior unto it, as the scaffolding is to the building.

The gospel is the history of God acting in triune economy for the recovery of mankind;—it contains the grandest plot, plan, and contrivance that ever bred in the breast of God, and which lay hid there from all eternity;—it is "the mystery of God, and of Christ; even the mystery that hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to the saints," Col. i. 26. This glorious gospel opens up unto us the love, grace, and manifold wisdom of the Father;—the person, natures, offices, and grace of the Son;—the person, nature, operations, and influences of the Holy Ghost, as the prime minister in the mediatory kingdom: it solves the grand problem of the heathen world, *viz.* the origin of moral evil, and, at the same time, discovers the only remedy for it,—it points out the universal corruption of human nature, and the only mean of its renovation,—it brings life and immortality to light, and opens unto us a joyful prospect beyond the gloomy shades of death and of the grave. These grand and important things, which the very angels desire to look into, are the subject of the gospel, and, therefore, in point of sublimity, it excels all other knowledge.

4. The knowledge of Christ crucified excels all other knowledge in point of extent and compass. In view of this, David says, "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad," Psalm cxix. 96. And the apostle Paul prays for the Ephesians, "That they may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," Eph. iii. 18, 19. Other sciences are but shadows, the gospel is a boundless bottomless ocean—it is the manifold wisdom of God; a wisdom of many plies, and folds, as the word

imports. It is an allusion to a curious piece of needle-work, wherein there are various expressions of art; and so it is, as it were, *the embroidered wisdom of God*. Angels, who excel in knowledge as well as strength, delight themselves at present, and will do so through eternity, in contemplating this wisdom. It is in the studying of Christ as in the planting of some new discovered country; at first men sit down upon the skirts and borders, and there they dwell, till they search farther into the heart of the country. And, indeed, my brethren, those who have made the greatest progress in the study and knowledge of Christ crucified, are but yet on the borders of this vast continent. "For now we see as through a glass darkly; now we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away," 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10, 12.

5. The knowledge of Christ crucified excels all other knowledge in point of profit and usefulness; "for godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come," 1 Tim. iv. 8. Arts and sciences, it must be acknowledged, have their usefulness; philosophy is a valuable thing; but, alas! of how little account are they, when compared with the knowledge of Christ crucified? What though a man perfectly understand the heavenly bodies, in their nature, motions, and influences? yea, what though a man understand all the secrets of nature, and could unravel her, from the sycamore to the cedar? If he is ignorant of Jesus Christ, "the Sun of righteousness, the bright and morning star," he, with all his cargo of knowledge, must be lost and ruined for ever.

Carnal reason and philosophy cannot give a satisfying answer to the weighty case of conscience proposed by the gaoler;—"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" All the wisdom of Egypt and Athens fall short here, and leaves the inquisitive mind fluctuating in painful uncertainty. But the apostle, in very few words, fully answers the case; "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,"

Acts vi. 30, 31. This answer, as one observes, is so old, that with many it seems out of date; but it is still, and will ever be, new, and fresh, and savoury, and the only resolution of this grand case of conscience, as long as conscience and the world last. Let this, then, commend the knowledge of Christ unto us, that it directs us in matters of the last consequence and moment, *viz.* how we shall obtain the favour and friendship of God, and how we shall steer our course for a blessed and happy eternity. In fine, this knowledge is profitable unto all things: it is profitable for prosperity and for adversity; for sickness and for health; for life and for death; for time and for eternity.

6. The knowledge of Christ crucified excels all other knowledge in point of pleasure and satisfaction: "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," Prov. iii. 17. The discovery of truth, absolutely considered, is accompanied with an intellectual, and, therefore, with a manly pleasure, vastly superior to all the delights of sense: and the more important and interesting the truth is which we discover, the joy arising from it is so much the greater. O then, how ravishing, how transporting beyond all expression, must the discoveries of Christ be to the gracious soul! "Their money perish with them," said the famous Italian convert, "who think all the gold of the Indies worthy to be compared with one hour's communion with the Lord Jesus." Archimedes, when he had solved the problem of the density of bodies, ran from the bath-room into the public street, exclaiming, in an ecstasy of joy, *I have found it! I have found it!* Surely the believer, who has learned that God is his God in Christ, has infinitely better reason than the ancient geometer, for crying out, in holy transport, *I have found it! I have found it!*

Moreover, the joy arising from the knowledge of Christ abides with the saints in the day of distress, making them to glorify God in the fire, and to cry out in the dark and cloudy night, "Hallelujah! he does all things well!"

However much people living at ease may be pleased

with the fine discourses of the heathen philosophers about bearing misfortunes; yet, when one is deeply plunged in distress, all the fine speeches of Seneca, the smart sayings of Epictetus, and the solemn counsels of Antoninus, prove but Job's comforters: and a single sentence of the Bible, sent home upon the heart by the Holy Ghost, affords infinitely greater consolation than all the philosophers put together. The sweet sense and experience of this, made a great and good man express himself after this manner, in a letter to a friend:—"I desire to bless His holy name who has delivered me from the painful pursuit of what they call learning, and from the foolish pleasure of venting the little of it that I know. I write it on all my books, and desire to have it engraven upon my heart;—'I determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.'"

7. Lastly, The knowledge of Christ crucified excels all other knowledge in point of duration and continuance. That head which carries the richest cargo of human learning, will very soon be emptied of all, and laid down, cold, and senseless, and silent in a grave. The knowledge of policy, the art of war, languages, laws, customs, and histories, will be just as useless the moment after death, as the knowledge of the meanest mechanic: but the knowledge of Christ will go along with us into the eternal world; and the more it is improven here, it will be so much the more dilated hereafter. Now these things being duly considered, we need not wonder that Paul "determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified;" and that "he counted all things but loss, for the excellency of this knowledge."

I conclude with a few practical inferences.

1. Here we may see the great worth and excellency of the Christian religion. It clearly and fully ascertains the terms, on which God will treat with guilty sinners in order to pardon and reconciliation;—it gives a satisfactory answer to that most important and interesting inquiry, "What shall I do to be saved?" while it directs the anxious inquirers to believing on the slain Son of God, as

the great ordinance of heaven for their restoration to the divine favour. Christianity tells us what Jesus Christ has done for us and suffered for us;—and what account God the Father makes of all this;—and what God and Christ require and expect of us, as an expression of gratitude for all this love and kindness.

2. If the knowledge of Christ be so valuable, then should not we lament the state of those nations that sit in the darkness of ignorance? My brethren, this gospel is not the privilege of mankind all the world over; nay, the proportion which the Christian world bears to the world at large, is computed but as five to thirty, which is a very small one. Should not we then lift up a prayer for our fellow men, that the light of the glorious gospel may yet shine upon them? Surely, if we love the Lord Jesus, we will desire an accession to his kingdom; and therefore will, with a deep concern upon our spirits, put up the second petition in the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come." Of six petitions that are in that prayer, the first three relate to the Redeemer's interest in the world; "Hallowed be thy name:—thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is common with us to bring in these great affairs towards the end of our prayers, as it were to spin out the time, when the warmth and vigour of our spirits are well nigh spent. But the friends of Jesus should not leave that last of all, which he has put first of all: at least, whatever place they assign it in their prayers, it should have great room in their hearts, and never be mentioned but with fervency of soul.

3. What a shameful thing is it, that so many of the daily hearers of the gospel should be grossly ignorant of Christ! Ah, my brethren, great numbers among us "are destroyed for lack of knowledge!" and the case is, not that they cannot get it, but that they are not for it. Their ignorance is not simple and involuntary, but wilful and affected. The light is come unto them, but, like bats and owls, they hate it, and choose "darkness rather, because their deeds are evil." They say unto God, "Depart from

us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways," Job xxi. 14. Well, remember, the day is fast approaching, "when he will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all them that know not God, and obey not the gospel."

4. The best among us, whether ministers or private Christians, have reason to lament and be ashamed, that we have made so little progress in the knowledge of Christ crucified. Alas! "we are yet but as babes in Christ, and such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat, being unskilful in the word of righteousness," Heb. v. 13, 14. Let us then shake off sloth and indolence;—let us sequester ourselves from the bustle and noise of a vain and vexatious world, and betake ourselves more closely to the study and contemplation of the most glorious object; in other words, Christ, and him crucified. Angels are our co-disciples and fellow-students in this mystery, though their concern therein be not equal with ours. It was our nature that he assumed, and not the nature of angels;—it was for us he laid down his precious life, and not for them;—we have the honour to be members of his mystical body, not they;—unto us is the gospel preached, not unto them. But they love to hear Christ preached, and therefore they attend our worshipping assemblies, and learn the manifold wisdom of God from the church. So much the apostle intimates, when he says, "To this intent, that now unto principalities and powers, in heavenly places, might be made known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God," Eph. iii. 10. Let these considerations excite us unto a more earnest and diligent study of Jesus Christ, "whom to know is life eternal."

Lastly, We that are ministers of the gospel should learn hence both the matter and manner of preaching. Let us preach Christ crucified. This was Paul's subject: and that man is certainly an ignorant, proud, and useless preacher, that refuses to follow Paul's example, and manages his ministry as if he had determined to know *any thing* but Jesus Christ and him crucified. Let us endeavour to understand, and to make our people understand,

how all the truths of the gospel meet in Christ, as so many lines in their centre. And, at the same time, let us be careful to urge obedience to all the laws of Jesus, from such motives and principles as the gospel suggests.

And then, as to the manner of preaching, let us declare the truths of the gospel in the style and language of the gospel, which is certainly the true sublime. The modern embellishments of style are as much below the dignity of the gospel, as they are above the capacity of popular auditories, and serve only to display the pride, pedantry, and silly affectation of the speaker. They may indeed please such as go to the church from the same motive they go the play-house, *viz.* for their amusement; but those who attend sermons, that they may be built up in faith and in holiness unto salvation, will not find their account in them.

I have often been much pleased with the character which Dr. Bates gives Mr. Richard Baxter as a preacher, in his *funeral sermon* upon him. He says;—"There was a noble negligence in his style; for his great mind could not stoop to the affected eloquence of words; he despised flashy oratory: but his expressions were clear and powerful, so convincing the understanding, so entering into the soul, so engaging the affections, that those were as deaf as adders, who were not *charmed by so wise a charmer*. He was animated with the Holy Spirit, and breathed celestial fire, to inspire heat and life into dead sinners, and to melt the obdurate in their frozen tombs."

To conclude: In our preaching, let us accommodate ourselves to the capacities of those with whom we have to do: let us choose such means as are adapted to the great end of preaching, which is to bring the hearer to the knowledge, to the faith, love, and obedience of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

SERMON II.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN'S BURDEN, AND EXERCISE UNDER IT.

ROM. vii. 24.—“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

THESE words present us with a good man in great distress; wounded in spirit; “and a wounded spirit who can bear?” When a Christian sees his foul face, heart and hands, in the glass of the holy law, he is filled with shame and sorrow; and readily gives vent to his grief in the Apostle’s words, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” You and I may be ready to think, that if we had as much grace, as much communion with God, and knowledge of his secrets as Paul had, when he uttered this doleful complaint, we should reckon ourselves the happiest men in the world, and be always praising the Lord. But none of God’s children have any useless talents. Strong grace is commonly yoked with strong corruption. This great man, notwithstanding his high attainments, is in a deep plunge; and out of the depths he cries unto the Lord, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

1. In the words he complains of his wretchedness, and bewails it from a deep sense and feeling of it; “O wretched man that I am!” Strange! what ails the man? why does he thus groan? what makes the great Christian, the great Apostle and preacher of Jesus Christ, the special favourite of heaven, Paul, to call himself a wretched man? has he lost his health? has he lost his friends? is he imprisoned?

is he under reproach and persecution? No: all these things he could have borne; yea, in all these things he could have rejoiced, and even gloried, that "the power of Christ might rest upon him," 2 Cor. xii. 9. But he was in hot conflict with that great enemy of God, and of all good men, called sin. He had entered the lists with the old man, and the battle was like to go sore against him; therefore he cries out, "O wretched man that I am!" The word here rendered *wretched* or *miserable*, does not denote one in a cursed state, as being out of the favour of God. The Apostle was by this time a regenerated man, and speaks of himself as such. Neither is his calling himself a wretched man, to be understood as the effect of a passionate and fretful spirit. Job, though a good man, has several expressions about the misery of his condition, that were the fruit of his impatient fits: but there is no such thing as sinful passion or bitterness in this expression, or in this text, which may be called the groan of a godly man; and therefore, this expression signifies, one tired and wearied with continual conflicts and strivings against sin. The Apostle here is like a weak man, wrestling under a heavy burden; and at length, being like to faint under the pressure, cries out, Oh wearied, Oh wretched creature that I am, who shall deliver me, who shall rid me of this heavy burden that is like to crush me? or like a champion, who having striven a long time, is at last like to be overcome of his adversary, unless he be helped; and so he cries, Oh, how am I tired and wearied! who shall deliver me, or obtain the victory for me?

2. He shows his earnest desire of deliverance; "who shall deliver?" And this the Apostle speaks, not as being ignorant of Him who should deliver him, nor yet as doubting or despairing of deliverance; but hereby he signifies his earnest desire of it. It is, as it were, the voice of one panting and breathing to be delivered; and withal, he hints his utter inability to deliver himself.

3. He shows what it is he would be delivered from, viz. "the body of this death." Some understand the words,

as if the Apostle had desired to be delivered from his conflicts with sin, by his bodily death. But I choose rather to understand them of the mass and lump of sin, that in part abides in believers, while they are in this life. The body of this death, or this body of death, is the carnal unrenewed part in believers. It is the old man, or the remains of sin in them. Now, this remainder of sin in believers, is called a body, and a body of death. It is called a body, (1.) To show the reality of it. Sin, considered either absolutely, or as it remains in believers, is not a chimera or mere imagination of men's brains. That there is such an abominable thing as sin, God knows, the saints know, the devil knows, and wicked men, who now deride it, shall know at last to their cost. It is not a slight superficial thing; but it is a body of considerable magnitude. Meantime, ye are not to look upon it as if it were a bodily substance, or a creature of God; neither are ye to look upon it as a mere privation of good; but as that which has likewise somewhat positively evil in it. (2.) It is called a body, for it has all the dimensions of a body. It is high "grown up unto the heavens," as Ezra observes, chap. ix. 6. Oh the malignant nature of sin, that dares approach so near the dwelling place of the Most High; yea, and to come within it, as it did when it seized upon the angels that fell. It is deep, for it goes down to hell. It cast the angels down from the highest heavens to the lowest hell. It is long and broad, for it goes to the end of the world, and the whole world over. (3.) It is called a body, because it hath many members, Col. iii. 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth," &c. The corrupt heart has divers lusts and pleasures. The seed of every evil thing lurks in it, and is ready to spring up upon every temptation.

But then it is called a body of death, (1.) Because it is noisome and filthy. A holy God cannot endure it: "He cannot look on it" but with abhorrence, Hab. i. 13. Holy angels and holy men cannot bear it. Nothing is so vile, loathsome and nauseous to them, as sin. It is like a vile

rotten carcass, that has polluted the air of this world, so that all die who breathe in it. (2.) Because it is a deadly thing. As the sons of the prophets said to the man of God, "There is death in the pot," so may we say of sin, there is death in it. Death is said to have "entered by sin," Rom. v. 12. And sin, when it is finished, is said to "bring forth death;" this latter being, as it were, the child of the former. (3.) It tends and binds over to death, Rom. vi. 23. It is the cause of temporal death, or the dissolution of the frame of our nature: for although the original constitution of human nature was such, that man was not absolutely immortal, yet it is not probable he should actually have died, without the intervention of sin as the meritorious cause thereof. And then it tends to eternal death. The regenerate, indeed, are not actually liable unto it, though there be remains of sin in them; but they deserve it: for sin is sin in whomsoever it is; and as such it deserves death. Hence the Apostle, when asserting the privileges of believers, says not, that there is nothing condemnable in them, but that "there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus," Rom. viii. 1.

DOCTRINE. The regenerate groan under remaining corruption in them, and earnestly desire a complete deliverance from it.

In discoursing on this subject, I would, I. Make some observations from the text and context. II. Show what is implied in the regenerate man's groaning under the remains of sin in him. III. Consider the reasons of the doctrine. IV. Make improvement of the subject.

I. In the first place, I am to make some observations from the text and context.

1. I observe, that here we have the combat betwixt the flesh and the spirit, exemplified in the person of the chief Apostle of Jesus Christ. Some, I know, doubt whether Paul here speaks of himself as a regenerate man; but I think there are several things in the chapter, which seem to put the matter out of doubt. Thus, verse 9, "For I was alive without the law once," &c. These words seem to

give an account of the preparatives to his conversion, viz. his conviction and humiliation; see also ver. 17, 18, 22. None of these things can be said of an unregenerate man.

Now, it is of great advantage to you who believe, that, in your strugglings with remaining corruption, you have the example of such an eminent saint as Paul set before you. Thus you know that your case is so far from being singular, that it has been the case with saints of the first magnitude.

2. I observe, that Paul makes a distinction here that is peculiar to a regenerate man. He distinguishes betwixt Paul in himself, and Paul in Christ Jesus, ver. 17, 18, "Now then it is no more I."—Paul, in himself, can do nothing, is worse than nothing; but Paul, in Christ, can do all things. It was not Paul in Christ that sinned, but Paul in himself. After his conversion, there was an *I* in him, a new creature, that could clear itself of every sin, saying, it was not I that did it, but the old man. Take heed to this, you that are yet unregenerate: you cannot speak in Paul's style, when you fall into sin. The load of the guilt must lie upon your whole self. You have not an innocent part within you. You are not split into a new man and an old, into flesh and spirit, but you are wholly flesh; you are wholly a lump and mass of sin; but a regenerate man, as such, is born of God; and "whosoever is born of God sinneth not," 1 John iii. 9.

3. I observe, that Paul, in his combat with sin, is not irritated against the law, which forbids sin; but loves and approves every part of it, verse 7, "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? God forbid." And again, verse 12, "Therefore the law is holy." The natural man's corruptions are irritated by the law, like the water that runs the more furiously by being dammed up; but the spiritual man, amidst his sorest struggles with sin, honours the law in his heart, and cheerfully acquiesces even in that part, which strikes against the sins that more easily beset him. The natural man does, in his heart, and it may be with his lips too, reproach the holy Lawgiver, as if he had, by

his law, made the way so very narrow, that there is no possibility of walking in it without being cramped and pinched; Psal. ii. 3. Whereas, he that is renewed, walks in the way of the law with ease and pleasure.

4. I observe, that the Apostle was a person deeply exercised about the sinfulness both of his heart and life. The expressions, I know, I find, I see, not only import his success in heart-searching work, but likewise his frequency and continuance in it. Had we more of his spirit, we should be more employed in this work; we should be more at home, and less abroad.

II. I come now to show, what is implied in this groaning of the regenerate, under the remains of sin in them.

And here, it is supposed, that believers are freed from the guilt of sin, which is an obligation to eternal wrath. They are in Christ; and there is no condemnation to such as are in him. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" Their remaining sin may bring them under the guilt of Fatherly anger; but his loving-kindness he will never take away from them.

It is here also supposed, that they are delivered from the reigning power and dominion of sin, Rom. vi. 14. Sin reigns in unbelievers like a king upon his throne; it absolutely prevails over them; but it is not so with believers. Christ is enthroned in their hearts, and sin is dethroned, and they are not from thenceforth subject unto it, nor do they serve it. Howbeit, by reason of the imperfection of sanctification, there are remains of sin in believers; and that is the cause of their groaning and longing for deliverance. Now, this implies,

1. Their feeling the motions of sin in them. Paul felt them; and O how feelingly does he speak of them, Rom. vii. 21, 23. No man will groan under an unfelt burden; and hence it is, that the unregenerate do not groan under sin, though it absolutely prevails over them. Let the heaviest load be laid upon a dead man, yet he will not groan: he will not cry, or make the least motion; and

why? Even because being dead, he has no sense or feeling. So the chains and fetters of guilt, lying on natural men, do not make them groan, because, being dead in trespasses and sins, they are void of all sense and feeling. But the remains of sin in believers, are like the bolts about the prisoner's legs after he is let out of prison, which, although they do not absolutely hinder their motion upwards to the hill of God, yet they retard it; they cramp, pain, and pinch them so, that they groan for deliverance.

Now, there are three things which contribute to the believer's feeling those motions of sin, which cause groaning. These are, *first*, the quick sensation of the new creature. Among men there is a great difference as to the quickness of sensation. Some are more sensible than others of the least touch. And so it is among irrational creatures. Now, although some of the old man's motions are greater, some lesser, and some least of all, yet the new creature, God's spiritual workmanship, is such a very delicate creature, that it presently feels them, and falls to resisting, wrestling, and groaning. The eye, and especially the apple of the eye, being the tenderest part of the body, feels the least touch. So the new creature is a tender creature; and therefore feels the first risings of the old man.

Secondly, The frequency of these motions causes them to be felt. The old man is only evil, and continually evil. He is never at rest, but is always plotting mischief. If he is overcome, he endeavours to gather strength again, and to rally his broken forces. If he overcomes, then he triumphs, and leads the soul captive for a while, Rom. vii. 23. Whatever way the soul is employed, either in religious duties, or in civil affairs, in public, or private, or secret, the old man ceases not to fight against him; and his motions being so frequent, the soul cannot miss feeling them.

Thirdly, The violence of them causes them to be felt. Sin sometimes fawns and flatters; sometimes it foams and rages, and has such an impetuous force with it, that it is

like to carry all before it. That was a violent effort of the old man, which almost threw the good man Asaph into the gulph of atheism, Psal. lxxiii. 13. He could not resist the first onset, it was so very fierce; but he did not lie where he fell; he wrestled to his feet again, and at last could say, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou has holden me by thy right hand." Thus the motions of the old man in believers are frequent and violent, and therefore cannot but cause pain; and they who feel pain are allowed to groan.

2. This groaning implies, the intense sorrow of believers on the account of sin, Zech. xii. 10. 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. Deep sorrow in the heart makes the countenance heavy, and is the cause of sending forth heavy groans. Yea, sometimes the hearts of the saints are so filled with godly sorrow for sin, that they cannot utter words, but only sighs and groans; and this, not because they cannot get words, but because they cannot get vent for them: like a crowd of people thronging to get out at a door, they stick so fast together, that none of them can get out before the other. When the prophet Nathan was sent to convict David of his murder and adultery, after the prophet has laid before him the heinous nature and aggravations of his sin, all that David says is, "I have sinned against the Lord," 2 Sam. xii. 13. At first view, we might think that short speech showed little sense of sin or sorrow for it; but it was not so. David's heart was then so filled, as we say, that he could not express himself; and he had at that time the seeds of the 51st Psalm working in his breast, in which he falls to searching and mourning afresh. And that this was the frame of the man's spirit, seems plain from the pardon that Nathan, in the Lord's name, intimates to him: "And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." The like may be observed of the poor publican, who smote on his breast, and cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The Lord knew that these few words proceeded from an heart humbled and full of sorrow; and therefore they were acceptable unto him; while the

Pharisee's many words, flowing from an heart proud and void of sorrow, were an abomination unto him.

3. This groaning speaks the believer's wrestling against sin, Ephes. vi. 12. Gal. v. 17. Fighting and wrestling cause weariness; and weariness causes groaning and longing for rest. The exclamation in the text was the issue of a hot conflict that the Apostle had with sin remaining in him. Could the difference betwixt the old man and the new man be compounded, there would be no more wrestling betwixt them; and so the one would not groan, and the other would not grudge: or, if either of them possessed the house alone, there would be no wrestling and groaning. But matters stand quite otherwise: there is no possibility of reconciling the contending parties. You may as easily bring east and west, light and darkness together, as reconcile them. Christ, by his death, reconciled God and man; but he put enmity between the old man and the new. And if there be no struggle occasioned thereby in your breast, this death is not yet made effectual unto you. And as to either of them possessing the house; I say, if ye are not yet renewed, but are wholly flesh, then the old man is sole possessor; and then no wonder you do not groan, for you are dead. Now, groaning proceeds from life, and is a sign of it. And as for the new man possessing the house alone, that is not to be expected: he will still have a competitor till he get to heaven, his own country, from whence he came; and then and there he will reign "through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Therefore, my brethren, fighting, wrestling, and groaning, is the best that can be made of it, in this imperfect state. And this consideration serves to obviate an objection that believers are often making against themselves. They feel so much atheism, unbelief, carnality, formality, pride and hypocrisy in themselves, that they conclude they have no grace at all. Why, my brethren, I grant the premises may be true; but the conclusion is false. Do not you feel all this whereof you complain? do

not you groan under it, and wrestle under it? Yea, surely. Well, then, I ask, Is not feeling, fighting, groaning, wrestling, the work of a living man? Yea, is it not the work of the new man which God has created in you, to bear down, and at length to break down and cast out for altogether, that atheism, and other evils whereof ye complain?

4. This groaning includes the sense of believers, as to their utter inability to deliver themselves. Paul was a strong Christian, yet he saw this Philistine to be too strong an enemy for him. He saw he could not, of himself, master this old man; therefore he cries out, "Who shall deliver me?" And presently he spies out the deliverer, even Jesus Christ, and gives him solemn thanks, ver. 25. Thus also is it with all believers: they are in themselves weak, unable to resist the smallest temptation. Every one of them has a greater or lesser sense of this; as David said upon the death of Abner; "And I am this day weak, though anointed king, and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, be too hard for me." So every believer may say, though I be anointed with an unction of the Holy One, yet I am in myself but weak; and my lusts, these sons of Satan, these children of hell, be too hard for me.

5. This groaning intimates to us, the believer's earnest desire of deliverance from the body of death. The men of the world cry, "Who will show us any good?" But the righteous cry, Who shall deliver us from the body of this death? O how different cries are these! and this is the believer's constant cry; this is the habitual desire of his soul. All the endeavours of believers are bended this way. For this end they pray, they praise, they read, they hear, they communicate. They exercise all their graces, and perform all their duties, with a view to get their old man brought lower and lower, till at last they be altogether delivered from him. Nay, so earnest is their desire of deliverance, that they welcome two things, which are most unwelcome to the unbelieving world: these are afflictions and death. They welcome the cross, as it is a mean in the hand of God for subduing sin in them, and making them

partakers of the divine holiness. They welcome the hot furnace, in the hope of getting their dross purged away by it: for though they feel it painful, they find it profitable. They welcome death itself, as that which completes their deliverance from the body of sin. We that are in this body groan earnestly, that "mortality may be swallowed up of life." Death, absolutely considered, is not desirable,—“We groan,” says Paul, “not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon,”—but considered as a mean of complete deliverance from the body of sin.

6. This groaning signifies, the believer's hope and expectation of deliverance from the body of death. Thus, the Apostle, after groaning, immediately subjoins a word which implies hope; “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” And it were well, if believers would learn of the Apostle here, to mix their complaints with hope, and their groans with thanksgiving. The old man may prevail far, but he shall not prevail finally. The new man shall at length be more than a conqueror over him. Let the groaning soul, then, lift up his head with joy, for “the day of his redemption draweth nigh.” And let the believer in Christ expostulate with himself, as David does, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?”

III. I proceed now to consider the reasons of the doctrine; or, to show whence it is, that believers long so much to be delivered from sin remaining in them. And,

1. The body of sin is that which God hates; so that “he cannot look upon it” without abhorrence. How then can the saints but groan for deliverance from it? One person may have so great love to another as to overlook his faults; but though God loveth the righteous with an unchangeable and everlasting love, yet he cannot but hate sin in them, and, in the way of fatherly anger, chastise them for the out-breakings thereof, Amos iii. 2, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” This is a way of reasoning worthy of God, who must needs abhor sin wherever and in whomsoever he sees it. It is the very reverse of his holy nature

and perfections. It is a state of enmity to his interests, and strikes at his very being. It would even dethrone the Most High. Oh, then, what an evil and a bitter thing must it be! The Apostle, not knowing, as it were, how to express the malignant nature of it, calls it exceeding sinful. And it is observable, that the Spirit of God, all along through the Bible, gives it and its servants the worst of names. Sometimes it is compared to poison, and sinners to serpents. Sometimes to mire, and sinners to swine. Sometimes to a tyrant, and sinners to slaves. These are the names by which God, who miscalls none, calls sin and sinners. Though sin be his greatest enemy, yet he will not slander it. No wonder, then, though the saints groan and are heavy of heart, that the least lith or limb, root or branch of God's greatest enemy, should be within their breast.

2. It is the body of sin which pollutes and defiles their souls. It is the most filthy thing. And hence it is, that our sanctification is compared to washing, cleansing, and purifying. It defiles instantly and universally; and the stain it leaves upon the soul is so deep and inveterate, that all the waters on earth cannot wash it away. There was once a deluge of water let in upon the world, which washed away the sinners indeed; but it neither did nor could wash off one sin. And at the last day, that dreadful fire which will burn up the sinful world, and the sinners therein, will not be able to purge away sin. Howbeit, there is one thing, and but one thing that can carry it off; and that is the blood of Jesus Christ. This bears up the saints. Were it not for this, they would sink altogether under the pressure of sin.

3. It is the body of sin, that so often interrupts their communion and fellowship with God, Isaiah lix. 2. This communion is the saint's heaven upon earth. It is the one thing which they desire above all things under the sun: and therefore, when it is suspended, you hear them crying with Job, "O that it were with me as in months past!" And then they cry, "Wo unto us, for we have

sinned!" They suspect the hand of Joab to be in this suspension of their comfort. Sin is of a quarrelsome nature; it deals in whispering and creating jealousies, in order to cast out and separate chief friends. It cast the angels out of heaven; Adam out of paradise; Cain out of the church; the Jews out of their dwellings; and it oftentimes casts the saints under God's fatherly displeasure. When they are taken into the presence chamber, and enjoy sensible communion and manifestations of the love and glory of God, their pride, security, carnality, or some other sin, creeps in upon them, which provokes God to withdraw the light of his countenance; and then they go mourning in the bitterness of their souls. Now, since the old man is such a fire-brand, need we wonder that believers send forth groans for deliverance from it?

4. It is the body of sin, that indisposes them for the service of God: yea, it vigorously opposes them in all their motions toward God and Christ, Rom. vii. 21, 23, "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members." My brethren, this is the thief which robs you of your lively frame; which takes away the living child you are so fond of, and puts a dead one in its room. It is this which occasions deadness and inactivity for duties, public, private, and secret. It is this which makes you apt to weary in well doing. It is this same old man, whose office and interest it is to fight against the new man created by Christ Jesus.

The holy angels are swift in doing the will of God; for "he maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." The saints in heaven never err, or weary in his service: and why? because sin had never any place in the former, and is utterly expelled in the latter. But the saints below are in the dust; the blood and the noise of the battle. Sin, in part, cleaves unto them. It is like the prisoners' bolts upon their legs, that makes them to halt in walking up the hill of God; therefore they groan.

5. It is the body of sin, that not only indisposes them for that which is good, but likewise drives them on to that which is evil. Of this the apostle complains heavily, Rom. vii. 15, "For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I:" and to the same purpose he complains in the nineteenth verse. It is a very malignant influence, which the old man has, when he indisposes the saints for doing good: but O how deplorable is their case, when he pushes them forward into sin; when he not only indisposes them for the great duties of believing, hoping, rejoicing, and patient bearing the cross, but likewise runs them upon the dreadful rocks of misbelieving, desponding, and murmuring against God. Moreover, all the out-breakings, small and great, in the lives of the saints, which give scandal unto others, are the effects of this old man, which is corrupt. These furnish another reason why believers groan for deliverance.

6. It is the body of sin, that is the cause of their slow advances in sanctification. Believers, what is the reason, that when the means of grace are so rich, and your opportunities so great, your progress in the good ways of God is so slow and so small? What is the reason of this languishing, meagre face of yours, when you have such plenty of heavenly manna? why so little conformity to Christ? why so little of his spirit and way to be seen about you? is not all this owing to the body of this death? Well, therefore, may you cry out with the Apostle, Who shall deliver you from it?

7. It is the body of sin, that makes believers so often a prey to Satan and the world. Hence our Lord bids his disciples "watch and pray." And poor Peter, who had been almost destroyed, out of hand, by the roaring lion, sounds the alarm unto all believers, that they be upon their watchtower, 1 Peter v. 8, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Satan and the world may offer and urge the temptation, but unless something within us comply with it, we are safe. They, indeed, bring the

fire, but the stubble, fully dry, is within our breast, which causes the flame. They shoot the arrows; and we, by reason of sin remaining, are like a thin soft partition wall, easily pierced, and in which the arrows stick, not like the flinty rock, which beats them back in the face of those who throw them. How natural, then, is it to groan for deliverance from that which betrays them so often into the hands of their greatest enemies?

IV. I shall now pass on to a word of application. And,

1. From what has been said, we may in general see the malignant nature of sin. It has disturbed the beautiful order which God established in this world, and changed everything for the worse. From whence come wars and tumults? what has turned the once beautiful garden of this world into a wilderness of nettles, and thorns, and briars? what has turned it from a palace to an hospital, and filled it with groanings, howlings, and complaints of various kinds, so that few but fools laugh in it? Why, all this is produced by sin. Sin, alas, has poisoned all our springs of comfort, and made them run with bitterness, lamentation, and woe. Above all, it is the founder of Tophet; the adequate cause of all the misery in the world to come.

2. Here we see, what sort of life believers may expect in this world. It is not a life of ease, or of profane mirth and jollity, but a life that resembles the life of Christ in the world, who "was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." The true Christian must be a runner, a fighter, a wrestler, a labourer, a groaner: and if these characters be consistent with the profane, careless, easy and useless life which many professors lead, let conscience judge. Alas! how many are there among us, who instead of daily groaning under the body of sin, have never to this day had one hour's serious reflection upon their lost state by nature. This alarming condition never robbed them of one night's rest; never blew up any of their worldly projects; never stopped their sinful mirth, or damped their proud spirit: and yet, amazement! such persons will hope for heaven!

3. Here is comfort to real believers, who are groaning under the remains of sin in them. My brethren, there has no temptation befallen you, but what is common to men; yea, and to the most holy of mere men that ever were. The great Apostle presents himself, in this chapter, as your companion in tribulation. If he, with all his gifts and graces, was a groaner, what can you expect? But believers may object, Alas! unrenewed men may struggle against sin and groan under it, as well as we. How then shall we know the difference?

I shall conclude the subject in answering this.

It is allowed, that both have strugglings against sin; but the difference is great. For, (1.) A natural man's struggle against sin arises from a natural conscience; whereas, a regenerate man's struggle arises from the new nature in him. In the latter, there is a holy principle, that strives against all sin; whereas, in the former, there is nothing but an old corrupt principle, which, upon some defective considerations, strives against some sins. Which leads me to observe,

(2.) They differ in their motives. The unrenewed man struggles against sin, because it is damning; the renewed man, because it is also defiling. The former considers sin as it disturbs the conscience, as it exposes to eternal wrath, or as it is inconsistent with some particular profit which he has in view. Hence his struggles arise. But the latter considers sin also, as it is an abomination to God, a transgression of his law, and a defilement of the soul. Hence he bends all his force against it.

(3.) There is a difference also in the extent of the struggle. The renewed man, although his sorest struggles are with the sins which more easily beset him, yet he struggles against every known sin, and against the first appearances of it: but the unrenewed man struggles only against some particular sins, which, from constitution, custom, education, or some other circumstance, he can more easily abstain from. As for some others, he rolls them as a sweet morsel under his tongue. There are certain favourite

lusts, which he still harbours and gratifies, according to their respective cravings. Examine yourselves in this point, my brethren. See if your struggle be universal. See if there be any Achan in the camp, which you have no will to bring forth that he may be stoned. If it is so, be assured your struggle is not the struggle of the new creature, but of the natural conscience.

In the last place, There is a difference also in the continuance of the battle. The renewed man continues the struggle till he obtain the victory. It is not a war for a day or two about the time of a communion, when the arrows of the word are flying thick about his ears; but it is a war kept up till death; whereas, in an unrenewed man, the cause of the war being the clamours of natural conscience, it comes to an end upon the proclamation of false peace in the soul.

SERMON III.

JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL, OBTAINS THE BLESSING.

GEN. xxxii. 26.—“ And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh: and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

How mean are the exploits, how contemptible are the encounters of the most celebrated heroes, whom the world admires, in comparison with the mighty achievements of faith! Natural courage and valour have gained a reputation to some, as if they only were the men, and valour had died with them. But when the sum of all is heard, it amounts to no more, but worm man striving with his fellow worm, for a thing of nought, and gaining a victory which can never be more glorious than their party and cause; the one a worm, the other a thing that is not. But behold an encounter of faith; worm Jacob wrestling with the mighty God, and that for the divine blessing; the party and the cause great, and the victory falling to the weak side. “ And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh: and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

Jacob's life seems to be the most remarkable of any of the patriarchs, for the vast variety of incidents that were in it: so that he spoke true, when he said unto Pharaoh, “ Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage,” Gen. xlvii. 9. There is, in his life, the most famous instance that is any where to be found, of people meeting with a

train of the heaviest trials, when they are going in the very way that God commands them.

The Lord had said to Jacob, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee," Gen. xxxi. 3. Here is both a command and a promise. But what a variety of trials did the good man meet with, while he went away, in obedience to the command, and in the faith of the promise?

One of these many trials was, that while he was left alone, there wrestled with him a man till the breaking of the day, and disjointed his thigh; "And he said, let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

In these words, we have the beginning of the conference betwixt the combatants. And here you have, (1.) What the man said that wrestled with Jacob, and (2.) What Jacob said in answer thereto.

First, We must consider what the man said who wrestled with Jacob. "Let me go, for the day breaketh." And here several things may be enquired into; particularly, 1st, Who he was that wrestled with Jacob? *Ans.* That it was one in the form of a man, all parties seem to agree: but then, who he was that assumed this form, there are different opinions among interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, with which I shall not take up your time. I am of opinion, that it was God that wrestled with him, having assumed the form and shape of a man for that purpose. And what satisfies me therein is, that Jacob not only solicits him for the blessing, but expressly calls him God, saying, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved," ver. 30. I suppose likewise, that it was the second person, God the Son, who wrestled with him in the assumed form: for the Prophet Hosea, speaking of Jacob, says, "He had power over the angel and prevailed," Hos. xii. 4. This is one of the titles of the Messiah. He is called the *messenger* of the covenant, or the *angel* of the covenant, Mal. iii. 1. The Hebrew word is the same in both places.

Besides, from what Christ himself saith, "No man hath seen God at any time," John i. 18. it seems to follow, that all the appearances of God to the Old Testament saints, in which he assumed the figure and affections of a man, were not the appearances of God the Father, whom no man hath seen at any time, but the appearances of God the Son, as a prelude or introduction to his assuming our nature in his incarnation.

In these appearances he put on our nature, as it were, to try how it would suit him, and quickly put it off again. In his incarnation he put it on, so as never to put it off any more.

2dly, What sort of wrestling was it? and how could worm Jacob prevail over an uncreated angel?

Some make it visional, and in a dream; others, spiritual, consisting in the vigorous efforts of faith to hang by the word of promise, which Jacob had got, together with the command to return into his own country. But that it was real, and not visional, and that it was corporeal, and not spiritual only, appears from the effects of it; for the angel touched the hollow of his thigh, and put it out of joint.

But it seems more unaccountable how Jacob had strength, so as to prevail over the angel. The created angels are said to excel in strength. One of them, we are told, smote in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred fourscore and five thousand men. What an unequal match, then, would Jacob, a single man, have been to one of the created angels! yet he prevails over the uncreated angel. This is strange! but the Prophet Hosea accounts for it, saying of Jacob, "by his strength he prevailed with God," i. e. by God's strength, which was secretly communicated to Jacob, and became his by the justest title, being freely given him by God. Jacob, in wrestling, no doubt exerted all his strength; but God, in that body which he assumed, exerted only such a degree of strength as he knew Jacob would overcome.

We may (as one * observes) consider God here as bear-

* Pococke's Commentary on Hosea, ch. xii. ver. 4. p. 643.

ing two persons; the one of a combatant with Jacob, and the other of an assistant to him; showing in the last greater strength than in the first; fighting, as it were, against him with his left hand, and defending him with his right, and to that putting greater force. And in the meantime, we are not so much to look on Jacob's bodily strength, as his spiritual strength of the inward man.

3dly, Wherefore doth the angel say, "Let me go, for the day breaketh?" If he was an uncreated angel, what force was there in this argument to tell him that the day breaketh? Surely day and night, light and darkness, all are alike unto God.

Ans. The Jewish doctors, who make the wrestler here a created angel, tell us, that the angels sing morning hymns before the throne of God: and therefore, when the day brake, the angel desired to be dismissed. But this is a fable. It may rather be said,

1. That the uncreated angel speaks this after the manner of men, whose shape he had assumed, as if he hasted to be gone.

2. The uncreated angel might speak this to put Jacob in mind of his affairs; that now, when the day was breaking, he should look after his wives, children and cattle, that they might not fall a prey to his enraged brother, and the four hundred men that were coming forth against him. Jacob had been absent from his family all the night, while he wrestled with the angel, and now, that day-light was coming in, it was proper for him to go and inquire into their welfare. Or,

3. He might speak thus for Jacob's own sake, that he might not be overwhelmed with his glorious appearance, by coming in of the light. There was something of terror attended all the appearances of God in a visible shape to the Old Testament saints; therefore Jacob makes a world's wonder of it that he had seen God face to face, and got away with his life. When the angel of the Lord appeared unto Manoah's wife, Manoah said unto her, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God," Judg. xiii. 32.

It was, perhaps, something of kindness to Jacob, that the angel wrestled with him in the night time, when the darkness would somewhat veil the lustre and glory of the angel's appearance, so that Jacob would be able to look upon him; and therefore, when the day breaks, the angel says, "Let me go." But,

4thly, He spoke this to try the faith and patience of Jacob, if he would part with him, or let him go without the blessing. Thus the Lord sometimes tries his people, by offering, as it were, to go away from them; not that he designs so to do, but that he may draw out the desires of their souls after him, and cause them cling to him with the greatest earnestness. God knew that Jacob would not let him go; but he spoke thus, that he might make Jacob's faith and patience conspicuous and famous through all ages.

Secondly, We come now to consider what Jacob said in answer to the angel desiring to be dismissed; "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

Can a man (says one) hold God when he has a mind to be gone? No; but Jacob by this time knew his party, and perceived that he tried him if he would part without a blessing. Nay, says Jacob, if thou ask my leave and consent to part so, I will never give it: Let the day break, and the next night come, the great blessing, and lame halting Jacob, shall never part, with Jacob's consent, without a blessing.

Here two things are observable, 1. What it was that Jacob wanted, viz. the blessing. And, 2. His resoluteness and peremptoriness that he would have it. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

What the blessing was which he wanted, may be easily understood from the circumstances he was in at that time.

He was now greatly distressed and alarmed, upon the report of his enraged brother's coming against him with four hundred armed men, to revenge, as he thought, an old quarrel he had with him. What shall he do in these circumstances? He dares not engage his brother with a

few servants, the women and the young children, that were scarce able to flee: but if the Lord would give him his blessing he is not afraid to meet with his brother. This would make him safe and easy, and nothing but this would do it.

He wanted, at this time, to have the old blessing he had got from his father ratified and confirmed, which his brother had despised: and then he wanted a new blessing, suited to his present circumstances, viz. That the Lord would either enable him to encounter the rage of his brother, or that he would turn the heart of his brother towards him. And behold how it turns out! when the two brothers met, instead of threatenings, blood and slaughter, there is nothing but mutual embraces, caresses, and exchange of compliments.

Let the spiritual seed of Jacob wrestle with the Lord, as he did for the blessing, and they shall obtain the heritage of Jacob their father.

In discoursing farther upon these words, I will,

1. Show how God blesses his people.
2. What is implied in this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul.
3. That this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul, is the only way to obtain the blessing.

And lastly, Apply.

- I. It is proposed to show how the Lord blesses his people.

And here I might take notice, that there are three sorts of blessings mentioned in Scripture. 1. *Paternal blessings*. Those, among men who first took upon them to bless others, were in the relation of fathers, and those whom they blessed were their children. Thus Isaac blessed Jacob his son, Gen. xxvii. 27. And Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph in a very solemn manner, Gen. xlviii. 15, 16. And when he was lying an old man, upon a death bed, he gathered all his sons before him, and blessed them, each according to his blessing. Now, these blessings were sometimes prophetical and extraordinary, declaring what should

be the fate of their posterity: sometimes they were common and ordinary, expressing the piety of the parents, and their good wishes for their children.

2. *Sacerdotal* or *ministerial* blessings. It was the office of the priests under the law, not only to offer up sacrifices for the people, but likewise to bless them in the name of the Lord; and this they did, not by a mere wishing blessings unto them, but by an office-power and authority granted them for that effect. The form of the blessing, as God delivered it to Moses, and he unto Aaron, is recorded, Numb. vi. 23, and downwards. "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee." This was the Old Testament blessing.

3. *Charitative* blessings, Psal. cxxix. 8. "The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord." Men pronounced these blessings, neither in the relation of fathers, nor in the office of priests or prophets; but all the Jews were to bless one another in the same manner. And after this manner should Christians bless one another. They should wish and pray each for the good of another. "Bless them which persecute you, bless and curse not," Rom. xii. 14. Howbeit, this gives no countenance to the common, careless way of saying to your neighbour or friend, "God bless you, God be with you." This is often in the mouths of those who have no regard either for God or his blessing. But tender and serious persons, who know the weight of the curse, and the worth of the blessing, will endeavour to be religiously disposed in asking the blessing, either for themselves or others.

Thus you see how men bless, even good men; but the good God blesses after another way and manner.

1. God blesses *in his own name*. The patriarchs blessed their children, the priests the congregation, and the people one another, not in their own names, but in the name and by the authority of another, viz. the great God. But God blesses in his own name, and by his own underived au-

thority. Thus we find both the oath and the blessing joined in the promise made to Abraham, Gen. xxii. 17. "In blessing I will bless thee." Here God speaks like himself, and as never man spoke. Men bless others in the second person, as, "Blessed be thou of the Lord:" or in the third person, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee;" but God blesses in the first person, saying, "I will bless thee."

2. God blesses *efficiently*. Those whom he blesses are blessed indeed; he actually makes them blessed. Men may bless ministerially; people may wish and pray for a blessing upon another; but it is the prerogative royal of the ever blessed God to command the blessing, as the Holy Ghost very emphatically expresses it, Lev. xxv. 21. Hence we learn, what a silly and empty compliment it was which Balak gave Balaam when he would have him to curse Israel, "I wot," says he, "that he whom thou blessest is blessed," Numb. xxii. 6. The profane prince had great expectations from the profane prophet; but they were vain and ridiculous: for those whom God blesses shall be blessed; and if man should curse them, our God can turn their curse into a blessing, Neh. xiii. 2.

3. God blesses *spiritually*. So speaks the Apostle, Eph. i. 3, "who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings." Nay, he communicates himself, and makes over himself unto his people. And he is the great spiritual and eternal good, Jehovah all-sufficient. He gives them his Christ, whom he promised to the church of old, as the greatest blessing; and in him they have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; so that they are complete in him. He gives them his Spirit to abide in them and with them for ever, as their counsellor, their remembrancer, their guide, and comforter in every event; and, together with him, they have all his graces, his faith, his love, his peace, and his joy; and at last they get the eternal inheritance, the crown of glory.

But who can reckon them up? who can make a full inventory of all the spiritual blessings conferred upon the

people of God? We may as soon count the stars in the heavens, or the sand on the sea shore.

4. God blesses *universally*. Not that he blesses every individual; for shoals of the sons of men lie under the curse. But whomsoever he blesses, they abound with blessings. As the curse is manifold, so is the blessing; and for every curse that is upon the wicked, there is a double blessing upon the righteous, as we see in Deut. xxviii. 3, 4, 5, 6. compared with 16, 17, 18, 19.

He blesses their persons. Blessings are upon the head of the just, says Solomon, Prov. x. 6. Blessings and curses are said, in Scripture, to fall on men's heads, *i. e.* on their persons, the head being put figuratively for the whole man. Now God blesses their persons, by putting them into a blessed state, reconciling them to himself, and renewing them after his image.

He blesses their sacrifices, prayers, and praises, by delighting in them, accepting of them, and sending them an answer of peace, Prov. xv. 8.

He blesses their substance, Deut. xxviii. 3. and downwards. Oftentimes it is very small: but a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked, Psal. xxxvii. 16. And this was said by one who had not the temptation to despise riches because he wanted them, for he was a king. And oh, my brethren, how wonderful is the effect of this blessing! it multiplies the righteous man's little like the widow's oil, whilst the curse consumes and wastes the revenues of the wicked like a moth, and melts them down like snow before the sun.

The righteous man, having a divine blessing upon his small pittance, has peace and contentment in his own mind, and sometimes can do much good to others by it; while the wicked man, with all his riches, is obliged to borrow, and what is worse, cannot pay again. It is an observation of the wise man, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth, and yet it tendeth to poverty."

He blesses their seed, Psal. xxxvii. 26. Isa. xlv. 3. As

it goes ill with them that are left in the tabernacle of the wicked, so it goes well with them that are left in the tabernacle of the righteous.

God remembers his covenant with their fathers; so that the seed of the godly have this argument, among others, to urge for the blessing, that the Lord blessed their fathers.

He blesses their habitation, Prov. iii. 33. Houses are blessed, not according to their goodness or badness, but according to the state of the inhabitants before the Lord. The curse of the Lord enters into the most stately dwellings of the wicked; but his blessing rests in the meanest cottage of the righteous. He blesses the house for the sake of the inhabitants, and he blesses the inhabitants for the sake of Christ.

He blesses all the ordinances of the gospel to them, the word, sacraments and prayer. He teacheth them to profit, and to sow beside all waters; so that like the bee, they suck honey out of every flower, while the wicked, like the wasp, suck poison out of every thing, Tit. i. 15.

He blesses all providences to them, whether prosperous or adverse, Rom. viii. 28. "All things work together for their good."

5. God blesses *eternally* and *unchangeably*. His blessing is like his calling, without repentance, Rom. xi. 29. As Isaac would not reverse the blessing of Jacob, for all the cries, and tears, and entreaties of Esau, so neither will God reverse the blessing of the righteous. Though Satan, the accuser of the brethren, bring against them many accusations, though their own consciences condemn them, though they fall into many transgressions which might justly forfeit the blessing, yet their God changeth not; he saith of them, as Isaac of Jacob, "I have blessed them, yea, and they shall be blessed;" blessed here, blessed hereafter, and blessed through all the days of eternity.

Lastly, God blesses *in Christ*. So speaks Paul, Eph. i. 3. God blesses his people, first, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then, as the Father in and through him. As Jacob obtained the blessing in his brother's

garments, so we must be clothed with the righteousness of Christ, which is the fine linen of the saints, and the garment of our elder brother, in order to obtain the blessing of our heavenly Father.

II. I shall now show what is implied in this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul; "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." As if he had said, I am peremptorily and firmly resolved not to part with thee, except thou bless me.

1. It speaks felt need of the blessing. It was this that made the prodigal first think of returning to his father's house, Luke xv. 17. "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger; I will arise and go to my father." My brethren, what is the reason that the multitude lying under the curse, instead of holding God for the blessing, as Jacob did, will not so much as come near him for it? how is it, that, instead of saying unto God with the holy patriarch, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," they say unto him, with those in Job xxi. 14. "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?" what is the reason hereof? It is plainly this; they have never to this day been duly sensible, what a weighty, wasting and consuming thing the curse is, under which they lie, therefore they find no need of the blessing.

The everlasting curse of the Lord, or his everlasting blessing, shall be the portion of every soul among us. There is no middle, no third thing to cast the balance one of the ways, but one of the two must inevitably be our portion; and what an amazing difference is there betwixt the two? The one is all happiness, the other all misery; the one is heaven in all its glory, the other is hell and all its horror. And yet the multitude of mankind live, as if they were quite indifferent which of the two fell to their share in the end. But when the Spirit of the Lord touches the sinner's heart in a powerful manner, as he did the prodigal and the jailer, then the man is convinced that the blessing is

indispensably necessary, and that he cannot be happy without it. Hence follow,

2. Vigorous desires and outgoings of the whole soul after the blessing, and the author of it. Formerly the desires of the soul were like so many streams in rivulets, one running this way, and another running that way; but now they are like one great river running with a continued course unto the ocean; all the scattered desires, affections and appetites, are contracted into, and united in this one point, even the blessing of the covenant, purchased by the Redeemer's blood, which only maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow.

In this case, the soul thinks within itself, and says to itself, "O how happy would I be with this blessing! Would God command his favour and loving-kindness to rest and remain with me, I should be little solicitous about any thing else; I should have an abundant balance and compensation for all the crosses, losses and disappointments I might meet with in an evil world: for his loving-kindness is better than life, and all the comforts and enjoyments of it. Let the carnal noisy world be sending up that unhallowed cry to heaven, 'Who will shew us any good?' It is, and ever shall be the desire of my soul, that the Lord would bless me indeed, and lift up his countenance upon me, and I shall have a far more solid joy and gladness than the men of the world have in the midst of their abundance," Psal. iv. 6, 7.

3. Frequent and fervent addresses to the throne of grace for the blessing. In this way Jacob obtained it: he wept and made supplication to the angel, and so prevailed, as the prophet informs us, Hos. xi. 4. From this patriarch's story, it appears, that he was a man abundantly brave and courageous; and it is no impeachment of it, that he burst into tears when he was supplicating the blessing. This showed the tenderness and piety of his soul; all which are very consistent with true honour and bravery. Who doubts of David's bravery? Yet, when wrestling with God for his blessing, he could weep so plentifully, as to

water his couch, and make his bed to swim. But why do I speak of men; did not the Lion of the tribe of Judah, in the days of his flesh, offer up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, Heb. v. 7.

When the Spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon a person or people, they are enabled, with holy Hannah, to pour out their soul before the Lord. The Spirit (as Paul says) maketh intercession for them with groanings that cannot be uttered, Rom. viii. 26. Not that the Holy Spirit groans, but he makes the saints to emit such groans and sighs, as the Lord very well understands, though they be not able to speak or utter the case in words before him. At other times, he allows them great freedom and liberty of speech in pleading for the blessing. He fills their mouths with arguments, and such arguments as no natural invention or gift could suggest. It would quite surprise any body that is unacquainted with the spirit of prayer, to hear what powerful rhetoric will flow from those who have otherwise very mean talents, when they are helped with the Spirit to wrestle in prayer for the blessing.

They will plead upon his name as Joshua did; "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" They will plead upon his word; "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope," Psal. cxix. 49. They will bring in all his attributes; "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?" Upon his faithfulness; "Doth his promise fail for evermore?" Psal. lxxvii. 8. They will plead upon his relations; "Is he a father, and will he suffer his children to starve?" or when they ask bread, will he give them a stone? is he a husband, and will he be regardless of his spouse?

Moses was such a powerful pleader with God for others, as well as himself, that the Lord speaks as if his hands were holden by him; "Let me alone," says God, "that my wrath may wax hot against this people."

4. A close and resolute holding by the word of promise, like holy Job, who says, "Though he should slay me, yet will I trust in him," Job xiii. 15. We speak of holding a

man by his word ; and indeed, if he is an upright and honest man, it is the strongest hold you can have of him, and the best security. Now, God is faithful who hath promised ; he is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent. There is not a man upon earth, nor a devil in hell, that shall ever be able to say, " Here is a word of God that he never made good." Which of you convinceth him of unfaithfulness to his promise. Since, then, he has promised the blessing, and exhibited it to you in the gospel, let faith grip resolutely to the promise ; and in so doing, you will get hold of the great Promiser, who will not refuse to be held by his own promise till he make it good.

5. The diligent use of all means which God has appointed for obtaining the blessing. Jacob wrestles for the blessing ; he prays for it ; he weeps for it ; and at length he obtains it. The spouse, Cant. iii. 1. sought Christ by night on her bed, and found him not. But did she desist, as if better could not be made of it ? By no means : she says, " I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways ; I will seek him whom my soul loveth : " and at last she found him.

They that seek the blessing must not lie down or sit still, waiting till it should fall into their lap ; but they must up and be doing. They must address God through Christ, by the Spirit ; " For the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." They must peruse the word of God, the blessed Bible, the great charter of their salvation sealed by the blood of their Saviour. They must wait on the preaching of the word, and the dispensing of the sacraments, particularly the sacrament of the supper, forasmuch as the Lord hath frequently made himself known to his people in the breaking of bread.

Lastly, Repeated disappointments and discouragements must not cause them to give over, but they must peremptorily and resolutely hang on about the Lord's hand, until they obtain the blessing. Jacob, in wrestling with the angel, gets the hollow of his thigh put out of joint, so

that he went halting. And now, we would think Jacob had got enough of it; he had wrestled his bones out of joint, and it is high time to yield to his antagonist. But it is quite otherwise; this discouraging event quickened the desires of the holy man for the blessing instead of blunting them; and therefore he stiffly holds his party, and tells him peremptorily, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

The spouse sought Christ upon her bed; but she does not find him there. Then she goes about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways; but cannot find him there neither. Then she goes to the watchmen, and says, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" They, it seems, could not satisfy her neither. But she still goes on in spite of all these disappointments. And behold, the unwearied diligence, and courage of faith prevails at last. "She found him, and would not let him go."

How many repulses and discouragements did the woman of Canaan meet with in seeking the blessing; but she continued her importunity, and prevailed at last. When the messenger of Satan was sent to buffet Paul, Paul tells us, that for this thing he besought the Lord thrice. Perhaps the first and second time he besought the Lord, the Lord gave him no answer. But he continued his addresses, and at length this encouraging sentence came forth from the divine presence, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in your weakness."

III. I proceed, in the third place, to show, that this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul is the only way to obtain the blessing.

1. It is the footsteps of the flock. We have several precedents and examples of this in scripture. That in the text is one; the spouse, Cant. iii. 1. is another. But the most famous example hereof, perhaps in the whole Bible, is the woman of Canaan, Mat. xv. She comes to Christ, and cries, "O Lord, thou Son of David, have mercy on me, for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." But she meets with great discouragement; Christ takes no

notice of her; "he answered not a word." Then it seems she addressed his disciples, and she meets with a second repulse; for they besought their Master, "saying, send her away, for she crieth after us." This is a clamorous and noisy woman, pray dismiss her, set her off. But she still insists, and Christ speaks; but behold the speech is more discouraging than his former silence; for he seems to cast her out of his commission, by telling her, that "he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" whereas she was of the accursed race of the Canaanites. But she is resolved not to quit it so yet. The devil was in her house, the devil was in her daughter, and she can not think to go back and fight with him again: therefore she comes and worships him, saying, "Lord, help me." And behold she meets with a fourth repulse; for he calls her by the reproachful name of a dog. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. Truth, Lord," (says she) "but the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Naaman the Syrian was such a dog as I, yet he obtained the blessing; Rahab the harlot was such a dog as I, yet she obtained the blessing; and why may not I obtain it also. Our Lord carries the trial no further, but grants her request; professing his admiration of her faith; "O woman, great is thy faith."

2. For confirmation hereof, we may consider the overflowing goodness and benignity of the divine nature, Luke xviii. 7, 8. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them. I tell you he will avenge them speedily."

If it be natural for parents to love their children, and to assist them to the utmost of their power, how much more will our heavenly father hear the cries of his children, and give them what they ask? To this purpose our Lord says, "If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke xi. 13. Now, the comparison here is not betwixt the gifts which earthly parents give their children, and those which our

heavenly Father gives unto his children; but the comparison is instituted betwixt the kindness and good will of the givers towards their respective children. All that love and affection which is naturally in parents towards their children, is implanted in them by God; and therefore it must be in a far more eminent manner in God towards those that are his children. "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" He that put all the affection and love in fathers towards their children, shall he not love his children? In fine, what Christ intends is plainly this, that the most tender and affectionate parents on earth, never gave any thing to their dearest children with so much heart, love and kindness, as God gives the blessing, even life for evermore, to his children.

3. The Lord allows his people to use this holy importunity and resoluteness with him for the blessing; and therefore, that method shall certainly prevail.

This appears in the parable of him who came at midnight to borrow three loaves from his friend, for the use of a friend that came to visit him, Luke ix. 8. "I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth."

The design of this parable is, plainly, to encourage Christians, in a holy importunity and resoluteness in asking, and hanging about a throne of grace. So our Lord applies it: "And I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you: seek and ye shall find: knock and it shall be opened. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Observe the gradation here. First, ask, and if that does not succeed, seek, which implies more pains and diligence. And if you cannot prevail by seeking, then knock, which implies still greater vigour and resoluteness.

From the parable itself, we may observe, to our present purpose, 1. That God's people may come to him at any time, though it were at midnight. 2. That he allows them

to ask very largely, three loaves, when perhaps fewer might have served. 3. That they may borrow of him without speaking a word of paying again. 4. Faith is not ashamed to tell the soul's straitened condition to the Lord. I have nothing to set before him.

USE. Let me exhort you to imitate the famous example in the text. Be earnest and importunate for the blessing; go to the Angel of the covenant for it, and put on a holy peremptoriness not to go without it.

1. Without the blessing you lie under the curse, which is a wasting, weakening, and consuming thing. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 20. Your persons are cursed. The soul, with all its powers and faculties, and the body, with all its members, lie under the dead weight of this curse, and how can they prosper. It is impossible for the soul to prosper in that case: and if the body be in health, it is but as the ox, fed for the slaughter. Your substance is cursed; there is a curse on all you possess and enjoy. Your ploughing, sowing, reaping, &c. are cursed. Your table is cursed; the meat and drink you take are cursed for your sakes. All your duties are cursed; your praying, reading, &c. are all put in the roll of sins. Oh, then, be convinced of the necessity of the New Covenant blessing to remove the curse, and to entitle you to eternal life.

2. Consider the extent of the blessing. It will reach to your persons, your souls, and your bodies; to your substance, your seed; to your sacred services, and to every thing of yours. Surely, then, blessed is the person, and blessed are the people whom God blesseth. What was very profanely said by Balak to Balaam, may be very justly and very devoutly said unto God, namely, "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed," Num. xxii. 6.

3. God is willing to bless you all in Christ Jesus. "Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you

from his iniquities," Acts iii. 26. The blessing is purchased at the expense of Christ's blood; ye cannot buy it, but ye may beg it earnestly, and receive it humbly, by the hand of faith. Know then, that this day, the blessing and the curse, life and death, are set before you.

And now, as for those that are the spiritual seed of Jacob, believers in Christ, I would have you to seek more of his spirit and temper, and you shall be fed with the heritage of Jacob your father, as the prophet speaks, Isa. lviii. 14.

When you have any particular suit at a throne of grace, any special blessing in view, do not limit the Lord to your times and seasons; neither faint and give over; but wrestle with him, and wait on him continually, and you shall obtain it. For this purpose consider,

1. How the great ones of the world expect to be waited on by those, who have any request to ask of them.

2. He is a God of judgment, and knows the times and the seasons both for giving and withholding.

2. Blessings long waited for and expected, have so much the greater sweetness about them, when at last we obtain them.

SERMON IV.

THE NATURE OF SEEKING A CRUCIFIED CHRIST, AND
THE ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN TO THOSE WHO SEEK
HIM, OPENED UP AND ILLUSTRATED.

MATT. xxviii. 5.—“ And the angel answered and said unto the women,
Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified.”

OUR Lord's question to Mary, weeping at his grave, may be pertinently proposed unto you who design to sit down at his table: “ Whom seekest thou?” John xx. 15. Man, woman, whom seekest thou? If you can sincerely say that you seek a crucified Jesus, our text speaks comfort and encouragement unto you. “ Fear not ye,” says the angel to the women, “ for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified.”

In the words, observe,

1. The person speaking, *viz.* an angel. “ And the angel answered and said,” &c. This manner of speech is according to the Hebrew idiom, where those who begin to speak, are said to answer, though no body was asking them any question; of which we have a great many examples in scripture, or, as some * would have it, he answered to the thoughts of the women, though they did not ask him any question. The grief and fear that was in their hearts would appear in their countenances, and in their behaviour: for though angels know not the thoughts of our hearts directly and intuitively, yet they may know them by the signs and indications of them.

* Vid. Erasmus in loc.

Luke and John speak of two angels at the sepulchre, though Matthew and Mark mention but one. But both accounts may agree, by supposing one angel to appear at first, and two afterwards. When the women came to the sepulchre, they saw one angel, and when they entered into the cave, they saw two angels more in shining garments, the one at the head, the other at the feet, where the body had lain.

The angels were not only spectators of that most amazing scene, God made manifest in the flesh; but they ministered unto him. They proclaimed his birth; they ministered to him in the wilderness, when he was tempted of the devil. When he was in his agony, there appeared to him an angel from heaven strengthening him. And they rolled away the stone from the mouth of his grave, and proclaimed his resurrection. They proclaimed his first birth from the womb, and they proclaimed his second birth from the grave: for Christ's resurrection was a birthday to him, in which he was declared to be the Son of God with power. The Father was then presented, as it were, with a new edition of his Son Christ Jesus. Hence, when he raised him from the dead, he said, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," Acts xiii. 33.

2. The persons spoken unto, *viz.* The women, Mary Magdalen, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and others. His first birth was by a woman, and the notification of his second birth was to a woman that had once been very infamous. He chose to make his first appearance to Mary Magdalen, out of whom he had cast seven devils, Mark xvi. 19. For the one great design, uniformly and steadily pursued in the whole scheme of the gospel, is to stain the pride of all glory, and to magnify the riches of grace.

The good women seem to have been in a very disconsolate state, both in their way to the sepulchre, (for they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone?) and likewise after they came to it. Mary burst out into tears, and cried, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

3. The speech itself; "Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified." Here, (1.) A word of encouragement is given to the grieved and amazed women; "Fear not ye." Observe here, there is not one word of comfort to the poor terrified keepers, who shook and became as dead men at the appearance of the angel. When John fell at Christ's feet as dead, he raised him up and said, "Fear not;" and when the good women were affrighted at the appearance of the angel, the angel said unto them, "Fear not ye:" but when the poor graceless guard of Christ's grave were as dead men, there was none to lift them; nor is there one single word of comfort for them. This, methinks, speaks terror to all Christ's enemies. You are now in prosperity, your veins are full of blood, your bones of marrow, and your hearts of pride and contempt of God: but know sinner, that the day is coming, when the joints of thy loins shall be loosed, and thy knees shall smite one against another, and instead of one word of comfort, thou shalt be cursed and confounded. This Jesus whom thou now despisest, shall laugh at thy calamity, and mock when thy fear cometh.

"Fear not ye;" there seems to be an emphasis in the particle "ye:" it is put in opposition to the graceless watch, that were affrighted and fled. Yes! these poor wretches have cause to fear the dreadful wrath of God, and they have cause to fear the wrath of man too; Jesus' getting out of the grave, is as much as their life is worth. But "fear not ye."

(2.) The ground and reason of the encouragement given them, is the good errand upon which they were come; "I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified." The keepers have reason to fear, for they have an ill conscience, and were here upon a wicked design, *viz.* to keep God's Christ in the grave. But you are seeking him earnestly, and out of love, and you cannot be easy till you find him: this is a good frame, an excellent errand; Be not afraid.

Their fear did not proceed from consciousness of guilt, but from the weakness of human nature, which cannot,

in its present state, bear a communication with spirits. Eliphaz tells us, "that when a spirit passed before his face, fear came upon him, and trembling, which made all his bones to shake, and that the very hair of his flesh stood up," Job iv. 14, 15.

"Ye seek Jesus which was crucified." The angel mentions his crucifixion as a part of the world's infamy and disgrace which had lately befallen him, and he mentions it in a way of glorification and triumph; that is, though he was lifted up on a cross, and then laid down in a grave, with a guard, a stone, and a seal, to hold him there; yet he is no more in the grave, but is risen, as he said: "Come see the place where the Lord lay."

Crucifixion was a Roman punishment, inflicted only upon slaves; and while the empire remained heathen, it was continued; but when the emperors themselves embraced Christianity, and the towering eagles resigned the flags unto the cross, this punishment was forbidden by the supreme authority, out of a pious honour to the death of Christ.

They laid the cross flat upon the ground, and the party was nailed to the four corners of it by the hands and feet, which were racked and stretched violently. Then the cross, with the party nailed to it, was lifted off the earth, and, by a violent effort, which gave a painful concussion to the joints of the crucified person, it was thrust into the earth and fixed there, so that it stood erect, and the party hung upon it.

Moreover, by the common rule of the Roman law, those who were crucified were permitted neither sepulture nor mourning; yea, a guard was usually set about them, lest any should take down the body and bury it; yet it was in the power of the magistrate to concede the liberty of burial. Hence it was that Joseph begged, and Pilate granted unto him the body of Jesus that he might bury it.

Now, though a crucified Christ be to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, yet, unto you who believe, he is the wisdom of God, and the power of

God. Therefore, thou that seekest a crucified Jesus, be not afraid, be not ashamed, be not discouraged, thou shalt certainly find him.

In discoursing further from these words, I shall,

I. Explain the nature of seeking a crucified Jesus. And,

II. Show, that such as seek him have no reason to be afraid, but should be of good courage.

III. Apply the subject.

1st, I am to explain the nature of seeking a crucified Jesus. And here four things may be briefly enquired into.

1. What it is to seek him. 2. Where we should seek him. 3. When we should seek him. 4. How we should seek him.

First, What is it to seek Christ? *Ans.* There is a three-fold seeking of him, which may be noticed.

1. An *initial* seeking of him at conversion, when the sinner's first acquaintance with him is made up. The poor sinner, scorched with the terrible heat of mount Sinai, law-condemned, and self-condemned, yet apprehending the mercy of God in Christ, seeks and flies to Christ, as the hunted beast flies to his den, or the pursued malefactor to the horns of the altar. Formerly he was seeking a rest to his conscience in the barren region of the fiery law, and a rest to his heart in the empty creation, but now he seeks unto Christ for them both; and having found him, he finds them both in him.

2. A *progressive* seeking of him. David exhorts us to see his face continually and evermore, Psal. cv. 4. And we find it given as the character of the saints in Scripture, that they are such as seek the Lord. It is their main business, their continued work and employment. But how is it that they seek him continually? Is he very ill to be found? By no means; "He never said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain:" he is of ready and easy access. But as all goodness and all excellencies are concentrated in him, his people are still seeking for their nearer and more familiar acquaintance with him.

The philosophers say, that the search into nature is endless; because new discoveries will always be made. Much

more justly may this be said of Christ. There is no searching him out unto perfection. The seeker of him, for any thing we know, will be surprised with new discoveries of his grace and glory here, and in heaven through eternity.

3. A renewed or occasional seeking of him. Though those who have found Christ can never lose him again, either totally or finally, yet they may want the sensible enjoyment, even as a man may have a thing, and yet not have the use or comfort of it. This makes them, with earnestness and vigour, renew the enquiries after him, and to cry with Job, "O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat," Job xxiii. 3.

When new straits, difficulties and temptations occur, these minister occasion for seeking anew unto him. When Paul got the thorn in his flesh, and the messenger of Satan was sent to buffet him, he sought unto the Lord no less than thrice, 2 Cor. xii.; yea, often, as the word here signifies.

Now, in seeking of Christ, there is,

1st, As in all seeking, a sense of want. A man will not seek that which he does not think he stands in need of. It is just so in the seeking of Christ. Though he is exhibited, and offered unto all that hear the gospel, yet none will enquire after him, till they have such a sense of their need of him that they see themselves absolutely ruined and undone without him. Hence, though the gospel offer is not restricted to sensible sinners, yet it is effectual only to such.

But alas! the most part do not feel their need of Christ, and therefore they never seek after him. The covetous worldling loves and adores a god of clay; the sensual epicure makes his belly his god; the self-justified trusts in a righteousness of his own; the wicked and profane live in a state of security, though without God in the world. Thus, every class of sinners have something they put in the room of God and his Christ. But when a day of power comes, the rich man sees himself poor, and miserable, and naked without Christ; the sensual man feels himself pining away and starving, for want of the bread of life; the self-

justified sees all his righteousness is "filthy rags;" the profane wretch becomes a terror to himself, and every one of them cries out, give me Christ or else I die.

2dly, A high valuation and esteem of what we want. The sincere seekers of Christ account all things but loss and dung, when compared with Jesus Christ, as Paul does, Phil. iii. 8. Such a light account does this man make of those things which the world so highly value. Luther called the whole Turkish empire, but a bone thrown among the dogs. When the spouse is asked, "What is your beloved more than another beloved?" She attempts a particular description of his excellencies, and then winds all up in this singular encomium, that he is "altogether lovely," or all desires, as in the Hebrew, Song v. 16. The blind world wonders what the saints see in Christ, to put such an immense value upon him, for to them he is a "stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence." But the saints have their eyes opened to see the superlative matchless beauty and excellency of Jesus Christ, so that there is nothing in this earth, no, nor in heaven, that they desire besides him.

3dly, A holy restlessness of soul, and a dissatisfaction with every thing, until we find what we are seeking. "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is," Psal. lxxiii. 1. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God," Psal. xlii. 1. Nothing will satisfy dry and parched ground but rain. The hart, they say, is naturally a thirsty creature, but especially when it is chased, it pants, and runs under the painful sensation of thirst, and nothing will satisfy it but the water brooks. So it is with the soul seeking Christ; all the gold of the Indies would not satisfy it without him; nay, what is more, heaven itself would not satisfy without him.

It is very observable, that when the Lord promised to send an angel before the people, to lead them into the promised land, it is said, that when the people heard the evil tidings, "they mourned, and no man put on his ornaments," Exod. xxxiii. 4. Strange! Was it evil tidings to

hear that they were brought into the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey? True, but it was heavy to the Lord's people to hear, that the Lord himself would not go up among them; and an angel's presence would not satisfy them without him. Moses protests against it, saying, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." He will rather stay with God in the wilderness, than go to Canaan with an angel.

The soul seeking Christ, is like the dove sent out of the ark, which found no rest for the sole of her foot, till she got back. Hypocrites, in seeking him, take up with something else that satisfies them in the meantime, and so they are indifferent, whether they find him or not. But believers can be satisfied in nothing, until they find him whom their soul loveth.

4. A hope of finding what we seek. People may seek Christ under manifold discouragements; but none will seek him in absolute despair. He has given great encouragement to seek him; for he never said to the seed of Jacob, "seek ye my face in vain:" and he says, "ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." These promises are a firm foundation for faith and hope to rest upon, in the soul's seeking a crucified Jesus.

Secondly, Where are we to seek Christ?

1. In the scriptures. Hence he says to the Jews, "Search the scriptures, for they are they which testify of me." Christ is the subject of both the Testaments; he is the running title of the whole Bible; and this, above all things, should commend them unto us. It is said of Augustine, that having read Cicero's works, he commended them for their eloquence, but he passed this sentence upon them, "They are not sweet, because the name of Jesus is not in them;" and this testimony deserves the greater regard, that it comes from one who was, without question, a very great master of the heathen learning.

The saints in all ages have found him in his own word; and therefore it is they prize it so exceedingly, and

rejoice at it, as those who find great spoil. Many times they have been enlightened by it in darkness, comforted by it in afflictions, and strengthened by it in temptations. There they have Christ in types and figures; there they have him in prophecies; there they have him in precious promises; there they have him in his birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming to judge the world at the last day. Whosoever then would find Christ, let them search the scriptures; and if the Spirit of God shine upon them, they will be sure to find him.

2. In the preaching of the gospel. The public ordinances of the gospel are wisdom's gates, heaven's trysting places, both for saints and sinners, where Christ is found of them that seek him, and sometimes found of them that seek him not. Hence wisdom says, "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors; for whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord," Prov. viii. 34, 35.

No fewer than three thousand souls found Christ at Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, amongst which were some of the murderous crew, who had imbrued their hands in the blood of Jesus; and who, of all persons whatsoever, would have been denied the benefit of that blood, had not grace been sovereign and free. As the serpent was lifted upon a pole in the wilderness, that the stung Israelites might look at him and be healed; so, in the pole of the gospel offer, Jesus Christ is lifted up and exhibited, that all may look upon him and be saved.

3. In the sacraments of the gospel, especially the sacrament of the supper. In this last, he is evidently set forth crucified before our eyes, and we have a representation of the whole scene of his sufferings; we are set down, as it were, at the foot of the cross, and by faith behold the whole tragedy acted over; we see his wounds, and hear his groans.

Christ made himself known to the two disciples going to Emmaus, in the breaking of bread, which, in the opinion of some, was sacramental bread. And in all the ages of the

Christian church, the sacrament of the supper has been considered as a special means of enjoying communion with Jesus Christ; and many of the saints have found it so, to their own most certain and comfortable experience.

4. In prayer. This is another great means of communion with God and Christ, and is called by some, the king among the duties. The prayer of faith is powerful and prevalent with God, of which there have been a great many surprising instances. Moses was such a powerful intercessor, that God speaks as if his hands were holden by him. "Let me alone," says he, "that my wrath may wax hot against this people;" that is, this man is such a powerful pleader for this people, that I can do nothing against them till he holds his tongue.

The Lord says, "I will not go up in the midst of thee, for thou art a stiff-necked people," Exod. xxxiii. Ay, but Moses falls a pleading and praying, and the Lord says, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Would ye then have Christ? Go to the throne of grace; pray in the Holy Ghost; for the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

5. In Christian fellowship. Christ himself has said it, and blessed be his name who has so often made it good, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," Matt. xviii. 20.

This word of grace was, not long after the uttering of it, most gloriously fulfilled to the two disciples going to Emmaus. They were in a most heavy and disconsolate case, for their master had expired upon a cross; and as they thought, was yet lying cold dead in his grave, and their faith and hope seemed to be buried with him. However, they were conferring about him with a sore and heavy heart; "And it came to pass, that while they communed together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them:" and though for a while they did not know him, yet at length he made himself known to them; for, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself."

O what a blessed privilege was it to hear such a commentator on Moses and the prophets, as Jesus Christ was! O what glorious mysteries would be opened up, what hidden things would be unveiled in that precious discourse! And O what a gracious impression did this discourse make upon the spirits of the two disconsolate disciples! Hear how warmly they speak of it, "Did not our hearts burn within us?" I believe the impression remains upon their spirits, now that they are in heaven, and will remain throughout eternity.

I think I have read of the famous Mr. Dod, that when he had met with any two or three Christians, his usual saying was, "Now let us speak something of Christ." And no doubt, in such discourses, Christ often manifested himself unto him.

If Christians, in their fellowship-meetings, would speak more of Christ and his grace, and less of matters of doubtful disputation, and nothing at all in the way of bitterness against those who differ from them, it would be a promising step towards the revival of the primitive spirit of Christianity among us.

Thirdly, when should we seek Christ?

In general, you must seek him while he is to be found, and call upon him while he is near. For there is a time coming, when he will not be found. But more particularly, you must seek him,

1. In the time of youth. The royal preacher exhorts us to remember our Creator in the days of our youth. Both the powers of the mind, and the members of the body are more sprightly and vigorous, and better adapted to the purposes of religion in that stage of life than any other. And surely, nothing can be more absurd and impious, than to spend the cream and flower of our days in the service of sin and the devil, and reserve the refuse, the very dregs of life, for the great affair of seeking God's Christ and the way of salvation through him.

O then, you that are young, be persuaded to abandon your sins and follies, and to seek Jesus who was crucified.

Methinks it is a charming thing, to see a young creature separating himself from a crowd of sinners of the same age, rank and station with himself, nobly rising above the temptations of his youthful years, and devoting himself to God through Christ, and minding the great concerns of eternity?

It is exceedingly pleasing to God; he takes great notice of early piety. "They that seek me early," says he, "shall find me," Prov. viii. 17. And it is observable, how much our Saviour was taken with the young man that came to him, with some concern upon his spirit about eternity; "Jesus beholding him, loved him."

2. In the time of affliction. The Lord says by the prophet Hosea, "I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early," Hos. v. ult. It is observed of Manasseh, that when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem, which was his kingdom, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

When people are carried aloft on the airy wings of worldly prosperity, it is hard to get good impressions either made or maintained upon their minds. The charms of the world make their spirits light and volatile, and dissipate their better thoughts. But when, in the course of providence, they are cast down from their excellency, and stripped of their gaudy trappings, and their furniture, the mind is more easily inclined to reflection and consideration. And now is a proper season to seek a portion that fades not away. The prodigal never thought of returning to his father's house, until he had spent all his living, and was reduced to an extremity of misery. Then, and not till then, he came to himself, and did seek unto his father, and obtained his favour.

3. Such a time as this is extremely proper for seeking of Christ. You have now both the word and sacrament;

and in them both a crucified Christ is exhibited and set forth to your view. The sacrament is indeed, in its own nature, not a converting, but a confirming ordinance; yet many have got a gracious glance at occasions of this kind, when the word and sacrament are joined together, and have called the place *Peniel*. It is good to be in God's way; he sometimes surprises such with a visit of mercy, as he did Zaccheus, who climbed up to a tree out of mere curiosity to see Christ passing by.

Fourthly, How shall we seek Christ?

1. We must seek him truly and sincerely, and not as the hypocrites, of whom he complains heavily, (Isa. lviii.) Why though they fasted and afflicted their soul? "Ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness," ver. 4. They sought the Lord in the common course of religious duties; but they had their circle of sinning too, a course of abominations from which they never broke off: so their seeking of God was downright hypocrisy.

I am afraid there are many such seekers of Christ in the visible Church; they draw near to him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him, and their ways are grievous and abominable to him.

Many, like the Capernaïtes, seek Christ for the loaves, and not for himself. They seek Christ and love Christ as a Saviour from hell and wrath; but Christ, the brightness of the Father's glory, they know not; Christ, made sanctification, they desire not; Christ saving from sin they cannot endure.

But if you seek Christ, you must seek him sincerely; you must seek a whole Christ, and not any part of him separate from the rest.

2. We must seek him affectionately, and with the whole heart, not in a cold indifferent manner. This way of seeking Christ is well exemplified in David, a man according to God's own heart, and a man in whom the spirit of devotion seems to have been in a very extraordinary measure. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth

my soul after thee, O God. Early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." There is a warmth, sprightliness and vigour in these expressions, worthy to be admired and imitated. Christ says, "Give me thine heart;" and surely it can never be so well bestowed. And remember, whatever else you give him, though you should give him all your substance, yea, though you should give all the members of your body to the fire for him, it would not be accepted without the heart.

3. We must seek him diligently, as Onesiphorus sought Paul at Rome, 1 Tit. i. 18. "He sought me out diligently and found me." Some of the Roman prisoners were suffered to go abroad all the day fettered; but they returned to the prison at night. If Paul had been kept close in the prison, he might have been easily found out, but having liberty in the day-time, he behoved to be diligently sought for.

The woman in the parable, who lost a piece of silver, is supposed to light the candle and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it. Luke xlv. 8.

If then you would find Christ, you must not fold your hands, and recline your head, but you must get up and bestir yourselves with all diligence, in the use of all the means and ordinances in and by which Christ uses to be found of them that seek him.

Mind the diligence of the spouse in seeking Christ, and imitate it. She arose and went about the city, in the streets, and in the broad ways, seeking him whom her soul loved. Go you and do so likewise, and you will certainly find him, Song iii. 3, 4.

4. We must seek him constantly, in opposition to the hypocrite, of whom it is said, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God? Seek his face continually," says David, "wait on the Lord and keep his way." Do not fret, faint, or weary in seeking him, though you should not for some time succeed, as well as you desire. Great men will be waited on, and are very

cheerfully waited on by their votaries and dependants; and will not you wait upon the great God? Will you not seek his Son until you find him, and until he manifest himself to you, and satisfy your souls with his loving kindness and tender mercy?

II. I now proceed to show that such as seek a crucified Jesus, have no reason to be afraid, but should be of good courage: for,

1. They are in the way of duty, and that is a safe way, in which there can be no real danger, though people may be afraid of it. "He that walketh uprightly," says Solomon, "walketh surely." The way of duty is the way to peace and comfort, the way to heaven and happiness; it is the king's broad way, and all those who walk in it have his protection.

I know that people walking in God's way may meet with heavy discouragements, as Jacob did, when he was returning at God's call to the land of his fathers. And on the other hand, people walking out of God's way may meet with outward encouragements. Peevish Jonah would not go to Nineveh when God bids him, but he will go to Tarsish; and behold he finds a ship as ready as himself to carry him away from God. But if those who are in the way of their duty meet with heavy afflictions, they at the same time have the consolations of God's Spirit, and the testimony of their own spirits to rejoice in: and in the end, they shall find that he has done all things well.

If then thou art seeking Christ, be not afraid, be not discouraged; thou art just doing what Christ would have thee to do, and what he commands thee to do.

2. Because they have the promise of finding him. "I love them that love me: and they that seek me early shall find me. And you shall find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart."

Pluck up your spirits, you that seek a crucified Jesus. Why are you discouraged? Why lie you thus upon your faces? The vision is yet for an appointed time; it will speak and will not tarry. The Lord, whom you seek, shall

suddenly come unto you. He has promised to be found of you; and he is not a man that he should lie.

There was never man nor woman sought him sincerely, who did not find him according to his promise.

USE I. O believing communicants, see here both your duty and your comfort. 1st, Here is your duty, even to seek Jesus which was crucified. As the Lord said to Elijah in the cave, "What dost thou here, Elijah?" So say I, what doest thou here if thou art not seeking Jesus?

I hope you have already found him; but are there not many things you want upon this occasion, for which you must seek unto him? Do not you want more grace and holiness, more of the image of God? Do not you want strength against your corruptions, particularly such of them as more easily beset you? Do not you want victory over the world, and over Satan the god of this world, both your inveterate enemies? Yea, surely, you want all this, and much more than all this. Why then, seek Christ, and you shall have all things in him.

2dly, Here is comfort in your duty. Are you seeking Christ? Why then, be not afraid; he will be found of you. If you be seeking Christ, Christ is seeking you; and where two folks are seeking one another, they will in all probability meet.

But oh, how shall I know that I have found Christ? *Ans.*

1. If you have found him, you will prize the discovery as a matchless display of glorious free grace. How would the malefactor on the scaffold prize a pardon sent to him? How would the hungry thirsty traveller rejoice to find a covered table in the wilderness?

2. If you have found him, you will love and esteem him above all things, Matt. xiii. 45, 46. Phil. iii. 8.

3. If you have found him, you will endeavour to hold him, like the spouse: and not let him go, Cant. iii. 4.

USE II. Christless, graceless sinners, I invite and entreat you to seek Jesus which was crucified.

1st, Christ is seeking you, and would gladly have you. If you ask what evidence is there for that, I answer, he

came to seek and to save that which was lost ; but you are lost and undone, therefore he comes to seek and to save you.

Has not Christ set up his standard among you by the preaching of the gospel? Has he not commanded us to preach repentance and remission of sins in his name to you? And is not that an evidence of his seeking you? Nay, sinner, that Bible in thy hand is an evidence that Christ seeks you ; for in it, he speaks as really and particularly to thee, as if there were not another besides thee in all the world.

Again, have you no evidence within your breasts that Christ seeks you? Do not you sometimes feel the strivings of the Spirit, the stings and remorse of conscience, which oftentimes put thee to a stand? Wherefore is he at all this pains with you, unless he desires your salvation?

2dly, Seek Christ ; for you will never find a rest to your guilty consciences, or to your wandering hearts, any where else for ever. As nothing can satisfy the panting thirsty hart but the water brooks, so nothing but the blood of Christ can pacify the guilty conscience.

SERMON V.

THE NATURE OF FINDING CHRIST EXPLAINED, AND
THE PRIVILEGES ENJOYED BY THOSE WHO HAVE
FOUND HIM OPENED UP.

JOHN I. 41.—“ We have found the Messias; which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”

IN the last discourse I endeavoured to open up that great duty and privilege, of seeking a crucified Christ, from these words, Matt. xxviii. 5. “ And the angel answered and said unto the woman, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.” Seeking and finding are connected together, as the precept and the promise, the duty and the reward. If you have been really seeking Christ, as you were directed, you have been well employed, and I hope not altogether without success; and you will desire to hear something about finding him.

The words read, give us occasion to discourse on this subject, which follows naturally upon the former. “ We have found the Messiah,” &c.

John the Baptist, Christ’s immediate forerunner, had two of his disciples standing with him; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he says in their hearing, “ Behold the Lamb of God,” ver. 36. The Lord so far blessed this verbal testimony of John to his disciples, that they presently followed Jesus. One of the two who heard John speak, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He was concerned to get his brother acquainted with Christ; therefore he, and probably the other disciple, went both together in search of Peter; but Andrew first found him. Hence observe, the

grace of God in the heart gives one a kindly concern for the salvation of others. Andrew got acquainted with Christ, and he cannot be easy, till he get his brother acquainted with him also. Paul's heart's desire and prayer to God for his countrymen, was not the restoration of the worldly kingdom to them, or that all their enemies might be subdued under their feet, but that they might be saved; saved with a spiritual and eternal salvation, Rom. x. 1. When Agrippa said to him, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," he answers with great good will and concern for the king's soul, and the souls of those who were with him, "I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds," Acts xxvi. 28, 29. If a man's riches and wealth increase, he grows more covetous and envious; he would engross all to himself, and cannot bear any to be above him, or equal with him. The world contracts the hearts of its children, and makes them narrow spirited, selfish and invidious. But the grace of God has just the contrary effect; it dilates, widens and opens the heart where it dwells; so that truly gracious persons earnestly desire, that all others be partakers of the same grace with themselves, and will use all proper means to bring them unto the possession thereof. Andrew here seeks his brother, and brings him to Christ.

The words of my text, are Andrew's joyful and triumphant speech to his brother upon finding him; "We have found the Messiah; which is, being interpreted, the Christ." The word Messiah is Hebrew; and being turned into Greek, it is Christ; and both these words being turned into our language, signify the same thing, *viz.* the Anointed. The particle *the*, in this place is emphatical, and not merely propositive. He is the, or that anointed one, by way of eminency. Other kings, prophets and priests, were anointed; yea, all the people of God are called his anointed; but he was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows, and received not the Spirit in measure.

This word, *eureka*, "I have found it," is made famous

by Archimedes the mathematician, who, in a great excitement, between glorying and rejoicing, first cried out so, when he had found the secret of king Hiero's crown; but it is made much more famous by Andrew, in the text, who, upon the finding of Christ, came running to Peter with Archimedes's word; we have found him, we have found him.

In discoursing farther on these words, I will *first* show what it is to find Christ: and *secondly*, what they find who find Christ, that fills them with such joy and triumphant boasting.

As to the *first* of these, what it is to find Christ, I take it up in two things.

1st, There is a saving discovery of Christ made unto the soul; and the soul sees him in such a light as it never saw him in before, which makes it cry out with Andrew, I have found him, I have found him: and behold, "He is altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand," Cant. v. 16.

There is an objective discovery of Christ made in the gospel, to all that hear it. There he is held forth and exhibited, in his glorious person, natures, offices, and graces, as the great propitiation through faith in his blood; as the only mediator betwixt God and man; as the way, the truth, and the life, through whom alone sinners can come unto the Father. But though the sun shine in his meridian brightness and splendour, they that are blind cannot see it. And thus it is with sinners; the god of this world hath blinded their minds, that they cannot behold Christ, the brightness of the Father's glory, shining in the dispensation of the gospel.

But there is an internal subjective discovery of Christ made in, and unto the soul, that finds him by the Holy Ghost. This Paul experienced at his conversion; and speaks of it, Gal. i. 15, 16. "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." The particle *in* is emphatic: Christ is

revealed unto all that hear the gospel; but he is revealed only in them that believe. A ray of heavenly light darts upon their minds, and dispels the thick darkness which formerly overshadowed them, and makes them to discern Jesus Christ in his superlative beauty, brightness, glory, and excellency. The apostle Paul, at his conversion, had not only his bodily sight restored unto him, but the eyes of his understanding were enlightened; for he was filled with the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to discover Christ unto the soul, and to form Christ in the soul.

Now, the mind being thus enlightened, it discerns in Christ three things:

1. A transcendent glory and excellency in him; whereas, formerly, it saw no form nor comeliness in him, for which it should desire him; and therefore despised and rejected him. Now, the man sees a glory in his holy, though humble and mean birth; in his righteous life, and in his bloody death: instead of being ashamed of the cross, which was, and is the great stumbling block to the world, he glories in it, and desires to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified: what formerly he thought a blemish in Christ, he now esteems as a shining beauty.

2. A suitableness in Christ, both as to the glory of God, and to its own case in particular. When once the sinner's eyes are opened to behold the abominable nature, and the dreadful demerit of sin, he begins to think how he can be saved, in a way suited unto the honour of the divine perfections. Sin is a breach of the law of God; it is injurious to his justice and righteousness; and such is his holiness, that he can have no communion with sinners: and the word of truth is already gone out of his mouth, "the soul that sinneth shall die." How then can sinners be saved, in a consistency with God's perfections? Why, the soul finding Christ, discovers in him a suitableness unto all the divine perfections; so that, in and through him, mercy and truth shall meet together, and righteousness and peace shall embrace one another. He who was not subject to the law, shall be made under the law, and magnify and

make it more honourable by his obedience unto it, than it would have been by the continued obedience of saints and angels through eternity. He who knew no sin, shall be made sin; and he who is the fountain of blessing, shall be made a curse, that we may be made the righteousness of God in him; and that we may be redeemed from the curse of the law, and obtain the blessing.

But then, the soul finding Christ, finds in him a suitableness unto its own particular case and circumstances. We never saw one thing answer to another so exactly, as the Saviour does to the sinner; and those who find him, are made very sensible of this: they are poor and miserable, he has riches unsearchable: they are weak and foolish, in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom: they are guilty and bound over to death, he is the great propitiatory sacrifice: they are unholy, yea, all as an unclean thing, he is without spot and blameless, and is made unto them sanctification: they are in bondage to their enemies, he is a King able to subdue them.

3. An ability and willingness to save. The soul finding Christ, not only finds one who is able to save to the uttermost, but one who is as willing as he is able. The soul discerns good will and kindness in Christ, towards itself in particular; as Paul did, 1 Tim. i. 15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

Sinners, under deep convictions, are ready to hesitate on Christ's willingness, saying, will he ever be merciful to such a vile sinner as me? But when there is a full discovery of Christ made to the soul, the objection is removed; and the soul discerns good will and kindness towards itself, in the face of Jesus Christ.

2dly. This saving discovery of Christ being made to the soul, immediately the soul closes with him, and is united unto him by the Spirit and faith. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee," Psal. ix. 10. "If thou knewest the gift of God—thou wouldest have asked of him," John iv. 10. The soul finding Christ, says of him,

“This is my rest, and here will I abide. He is my righteousness, my rock, my refuge, my portion, for time and for eternity.”

I proceed, *secondly*, to show, what they find who find Christ, that fills them with such joy and triumphant boasting. And,

1. They who find Christ, find life. Prov. viii. 35. “For whoso findeth me, findeth life; and shall obtain favour of the Lord.” How greedily would a drowning man lay hold of a rope thrown in to him to pull him out? how would the malefactor upon the scaffold rejoice at the king’s pardon being sent to him? How much more must the sinner, who saw himself bound with the cords of death and damnation, rejoice to have them loosed! The judge said unto him, thou shalt surely die, and he looked for nothing else; but Christ has said unto him, thou shalt live and not die.

They who find Christ, find a life of justification. The law’s condemnatory sentence is repealed, and its obligatory bond cancelled: they are declared righteous, on account of his righteousness imputed unto them, and they are adjudged unto eternal life. They find a life of sanctification: the seeds, habits, and principles of grace, are implanted in their hearts by the Holy Ghost: so that from thenceforth they live unto God, and unto his Son Jesus Christ.

They find a life of inward comfort. Christ says to the justified sinner, as David’s men said to Nabal, “Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast,” 1 Sam. xxv. 6. None have such cause to lead a joyful life, as those who have found Christ; for they have peace with God and eternal life: all things are theirs, and all things shall work together for their good.

They find a life of glory. John x. 28. “I give unto them eternal life.” This life of glory is begun in their regeneration, and carried on in their gradual sanctification. Heaven is brought down to their souls; and when their souls are carried up into heaven, and “when Christ who

is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory."

2. They who find Christ find liberty. "In whom we have redemption through his blood," Eph. i. 7. Christ himself says, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed," John viii. 36. Life is very uncomfortable without liberty. How would it embitter life, to be always in prison and in chains; but if it could give one joy, just to be brought out of prison and set at liberty, how much more would one rejoice, to be brought out of prison to reign, as Solomon speaks? What a heavy life had the Jews in Babylon for seventy years, being in bondage to a foreign enemy; and "how was their mouth filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing, when the Lord turned again their captivity," Psal. cxxvi. 2. Then they cried, "The Lord hath done great things for us: whereof we are glad," ver. 3. I remember it is said of the Grecians, that when Titus Flaminius had restored their ancient liberties, and proclamation was made thereof by an herald, they so pressed to hear it, that the herald was in great danger of being squeezed to death among the people; but when the proclamation was ended, there were heard such shouts and acclamations, that the very birds of the air fell down astonished with the noise, while they continued to cry, a saviour, a saviour.

My brethren, that thralldom and bondage from which Christ delivers us, is much greater and more dreadful, than that from which Titus delivered the Greeks. Sinners are bond slaves to a foreign prince, a prince of another nature than themselves; they are shut up in the prison of a natural state, and bound with many bands and fetters: but finding Christ, they find liberty; he knocks off their chains and fetters, opens the prison doors, and says to them, Go forth, you are free. Oh then, how much are they bound to show forth the praises of him, who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light!

3. They who find Christ, find a treasure. The kingdom of heaven, *i. e.* the gospel, or Christ in the gospel, "is like

unto a treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field," Matt. xiii. 44.

There are several things in the notion of a treasure, which agree very well unto Jesus Christ. Thus, for example, there is preciousness in the notion of a treasure; things treasured up are precious, either in their own nature, or in the esteem of those who make them their treasure. How well does this agree to Jesus Christ! he is precious in himself, and likewise unto them that believe. They who find him, find the pearl of great price; the plant of renown; the altogether lovely object; the most valuable blessing that heaven can bestow, or mankind receive.

There is riches in a treasure. Worldly men treasure up riches and wealth as their portion; but whoso find Christ, find the richest treasure that can be conceived. Hence we read of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and of all fulness dwelling in him.

These riches do not consist of silver and gold, which are perishing things, and unsuitable to the soul; but they are spiritual and eternal riches, riches of grace, and riches of mercy, and riches of glory.

Again, there is hiddenness in a treasure. Things treasured up are secret and hidden from the world. Christ is the treasure hid in the field of the gospel; he is a veiled beauty which few have eyes to discern; he is a mystery in his person, offices, and grace; the blind world know him not at all; they who believe know him but in part; "but when that which is in part shall be done away, then that which is perfect shall come."

And then, there is a variety in a treasure. And so those who find Christ, find a rich variety in him for their entertainment: here is food, here is clothing, here are remedies for all diseases, salves for all sores; here are all the precious promises; here is armour for the day of battle, and comfort for the day of distress; here is wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

4. They who find Christ, find rest: he is the rest where-

with the weary may obtain rest, and he is the refreshing; therefore he solemnly invites the weary world of mankind sinners unto him, saying, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you for it is easy, and my burden for it is light," Matt. xi. 28, 29. Now those who find Christ, find a threefold rest.

1st, They find a present rest to their consciences, Rom. v. 1. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." When conscience is awakened by the terrors of the law, the sinner naturally seeks rest and peace in the law, by his reformation and obedience; but still the conscience is not at peace, for it is impure, and threatens the sinner with eternal wrath: but the sinner finding Christ, gets the thorn of guilt pulled out of his conscience; it is purified, and pacified, and instead of accusing and condemning him, it absolves, and clears, and comforts him.

2dly, They find a present rest to the heart. The heart of man is a large and capacious thing, so that the whole creation can never satisfy it; but it is still crying, give, give, and never says it is enough. "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing; that which is crooked cannot be made straight, that which is wanting cannot be numbered." The world is such a lottery, that if a man were to draw through eternity, he would still draw blanks, and never draw the prize. But they who find Christ, find an immediate rest to the wandering unsatisfied heart. Now they are at a point, and will go no further: they say with the Psalmist, "And now, O Lord, what wait I for? my hope is fixed on thee; this is my rest, and here I will abide."

3dly, They find a future eternal rest in heaven, Heb. iv. 9. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." They may have a restless life here, in respect of outward troubles and calamities; but heaven will make amends for all. And as meat relishes best with the hungry, and rest is most refreshing to the weary; so there will be a certain sweetness in the heavenly rest of the saints, after all their

labours, and sorrows, and sufferings, which would not have been in it, if they had never endured these things.

5. They who find Christ, find a refuge. David tells us, that when he was in great distress, and all refuge failed him, he said unto the Lord, "Thou art my refuge," Psal. cxlii. 4, 5. It is prophesied of the Messiah, that he "shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest: as rivers of waters in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," Isa. xxxii. 2. The justice of God pursues the sinner out of Christ; and when the sinner's eyes are opened to see the enemy and avenger hard at his heels, he cries, and flies, and knows not what to do: but finding Christ, he finds a refuge where he may be safe from the pursuer. And oh, how acceptable and refreshing is this refuge unto him! It is like the water brooks to the poor panting and braying hart, or the king's pardon to the malefactor upon the scaffold.

It is observable, that great pains were taken of old to make the way unto the cities of refuge plain and patent. The magistrates of Israel were commanded to prepare the way unto them, as we see, Deut. xix. 3. And it is in allusion hereunto, that the Baptist calls himself, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." The roads leading to this city were to be more than thirty cubits broad; the hills on the way to them were to be levelled, the ditches to be filled up, and bridges laid over the waters; and, at the parting of the roads, there were statues erected with this inscription, refuge, refuge, and with a hand pointing to the city of refuge, that those who were flying to them might have nothing to retard their motion.

And no doubt, the first sight of one of those cities would be very rejoicing to the heart of a poor man, who having slain one unawares, was flying thither: even so the poor convinced contrite sinner, hotly pursued by avenging justice, rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory, to find Christ, the great refuge of heaven's estimation for people in those circumstances.

6. They who find Christ, find a portion. When David found himself cast off at all hands, he cried unto the Lord, "Thou art my portion in the land of the living," Psal. cxlii. 6. The double portion of goods moveable, was one of the rights of primogeniture among the Jews; and so all those who are members of the general assembly and church of the first-born, having Christ for their portion, have the double portion. It is not a portion of silver and gold, houses or lands; all these things fade away and perish with the using; but it is a portion that will outlive all the clay portions of the world's children: it is a crown of glory that fades not away; an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled; it is a soul enriching, satisfying and up-making portion for time and eternity.

Lastly, They who find Christ, find all things in him necessary to their eternal happiness and welfare. Read the eighth chapter to the Romans, and there you have an inventory of your privileges in and by Jesus Christ. "Whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present, or thing to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

The things of the world answer their respective ends and purposes for which they were designed; but Jesus Christ is profitable for all things; in him we are completely furnished with every thing necessary for our eternal well.

USE 1. Let us see, acknowledge, and applaud the happiness of those who have found Christ. Let us say, Happy is the people in such a case! "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord." They have found life, they have found liberty, a treasure, a rest, a refuge, a portion, all things necessary for their eternal happiness. Is it possible for us to figure in our own minds a person or a people in better circumstances?

You that are merry jovial persons in the world, think not religion a melancholy exercise; count not the saints of the Most High to be of all men the most miserable: they are satisfied with their lot and portion, yea, rejoice and glory in it, and would not exchange with you for a thousand worlds.

2. Search and try, examine yourselves whether you have found Jesus Christ? You were lately making a very solemn profession of seeking a crucified Jesus, while you sat down at his table. How have you succeeded? Have you found him? Consider,

1st, If you have found him, you will prize the discovery and be highly transported with it. Augustine was so transported with the discovery of the truth, in his dispute with the Manichæans, that he clapt upon the table, and cried, *Conclusum est contra Manicheos*. "The Manichees have no more to say." If the discovery of truth is so transporting, how much more transporting must the discovery of him who is the truth itself be! You will say within yourselves, I was seeking asses, and behold I have found a kingdom; I was wandering in search of happiness, now I have found it; I was a dog under the table, now I sit among the children at the table; I was feeding on dust with the serpent, and on husks with the swine, now I have found the hidden manna, the bread of life which came down from heaven.

2dly, If you have found him, you will love and esteem him above all things.

The merchantman seeking goodly pearls, when he had found the pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it, Matt. xiii. 46. People may judge of their state, by the habitual current of their affections. What is it you love and esteem most of all? Is it Christ or the creatures, heaven or earth, the seen or the unseen world?

3dly, If you have found him, you will have got other views of sin and of yourselves, than ever you had before.

Manifestations of the glory of Christ, are ever attended with humbling discoveries of the nature of sin. When Job had seen the Lord, he cries out, "Behold I am vile; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and in ashes:" and Isaiah, upon the same occasion cries out, "Wo is me, for I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips," Job xlii. 5, 6. Isa. vi. 5.

4thly, If you have found him, you will earnestly desire greater and farther discoveries of him; you will say with Moses, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," Exod. xxxiii. 18. Moses had often before this time seen the glory of the Lord; the Lord had talked with him face to face, as a man talks with his friend. But communion with God is one of those things which never cloy or wearies the soul; therefore he cries out, with as great earnestness as ever, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory."

Lastly, Unregenerate sinners, living without God in the world, I exhort you to seek Christ, and not to give over the search until you find him.

1. Consider what a great mercy it is, that God will be found of you. He will not be found of the fallen angels; he will not be found of the damned in hell; but he will be found of you, if you will seek him with all your heart.

2. If you will not seek him now, the time will come when you shall seek him and he will not be found of you. So he has threatened, Prov. i. 24. and downwards, "Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hands and no man regarded. I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

SERMON VI.

THE GREAT ADVANTAGE OF AFFLICTIONS TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

GEN. xlii. 36.—“ And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not; and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.”

IT is amazing to think of the divine condescension, in establishing such a close connexion betwixt his own glory and the good of his people. The right improvement of this consideration, is enough to quiet the mind of a Christian, under the most dark and perplexing event of Providence that can befall him. What greater security would we have, that all things shall work together for our good, than this, that our good is in a close connexion with the divine glory: yet how ready are we to put asunder what God hath joined? The Christian, in the hastiness of his spirit, occasioned by a multiplicity of sore trials, is apt to say with Jacob, “ all these things are against me:” whereas, the promise says, that all these things shall work together for his good.

In this chapter we are told, that Jacob’s sons were sent down to Egypt to buy corn, because of the famine in their own land. Joseph, their brother, whom they had sold, was now governor of all the land of Egypt; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. He knew his brethren when they came to him, though they did not know him. He dealt severely with them at the first, which brought their old guilt to their remembrance. He threatens them as spies; puts them all in prison for three days; takes

Simeon and binds him before their eyes, to keep him until they should return; and orders them to bring their youngest brother Benjamin along with them, the favourite son, whom the father would not send with his brethren at first, lest peradventure some mischief should befall him.

When they came home and told all this unto their father, the good old man, in a fit of strong grief, cries out, "Me have ye bereaved of my children." It is a supplement, but a natural one, as appears from what follows; ye have bereaved me, or robbed me. They had sold Joseph into the hands of the Ishmaelitish merchants, though their father knew it not, but imagined that he was destroyed by wild beasts; and this deed of theirs gave rise to what befell the other two, to wit, the binding of Simeon, and the demanding of Benjamin; so that they were justly chargeable with robbing the old man of his sons. New trials bring old ones of the same kind fresh to remembrance.

The fate of Simeon's and Benjamin's puts Jacob in mind of his son Joseph; and so he makes an enumeration of some heavy trials with respect to him. "Joseph is not." He reckoned that he was dead long ago. "Simeon is not;" he was bound by the governor of the land of Egypt, and he gave him up for dead also. And as for Benjamin, whom they wanted to take along with them, it is likely, he thought, that if he went once away, he would never see him more: so that here was a train of sore trials; and the old man, under the weight of them, cries out, "all these things are against me;" or, as it is in the original, "upon me:" that is, they are extremely heavy upon me, insomuch that they cannot be borne; they will sink me even to the grave. Yet in all this God had a kind design towards Jacob and his family. He was to bring much good to him out of these sore trials; but he, in the excess of his grief, could not see how this breach upon breach, made upon his family, could tend to his and their advantage; and therefore he says, "all these things are against me."

The observation from the words is, whatever discouraging thoughts the Christian may have under the trials of

life, yet it is most certain, that not one of them are against him, but all of them for his good. This observation I propose to illustrate.

First, They are, by divine appointment, subservient to the great work of sanctification in him. The Apostle, speaking of our earthly parents, says, "They, verily, for a few days, chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." Parents chastise their children after their own pleasure, which is often not well regulated; yea, often they chastise, rather for gratifying their own passion than profiting their children: but our heavenly Father chastises his children always for their profit. And if it be asked, where is the profit they get by it? The answer is, they are made partakers of their Father's holiness, and that is the greatest gain.

Afflictions are his lance, whereby he lets out the humours. They are the furnace into which he casts the vessels of mercy, not to destroy them, but to prepare them unto glory. He sits as a skilful refiner watching over his metal, that nothing be lost but the dross; and he brings it at length out of the furnace, shining and pure as gold. Now, my brethren, sanctification is a thing absolutely necessary to us; "for without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" and then, it is the top of the desires of the saints. If there is any one thing which they wish for above another, it is, that they may be made partakers of his holiness. And if this be so, then, certainly, that which is a mean of advancing holiness in them, must needs be profitable unto them. But afflictions are one of these means; and therefore the Christian must not say with Jacob, "all these things are against me." True, indeed, some carry a cross who are not following after Jesus. Many are under great afflictions, and, at the same time, in the gall of bitterness. But you must consider, that the good effect of afflictions is by the appointment of God: therefore, when the chosen of God are called to take up the cross, this divine appointment will be upon it; and so sanctification will flow from

it. The crabbed tree of the cross, by the kindly influence of the Holy Ghost, brings forth fruits of righteousness, to the praise and glory of God. Hence the righteous are said to flourish like the palm-tree, which grows the more that it is pressed down.

Secondly, The difficulties occurring in the Christian's life are not against him, but for his good; because by them he is conformed unto Jesus Christ his head; of whom we have, among others, this surprising account, "that he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." How strong and nervous are the expressions. A man of sorrows is more than a sorrowful man: It is a man, as it were, made up of sorrows. Now, as conformity to Christ is the indispensable duty of the saints, so it is their interest; and, at the same time, the greatest piece of honour that can be conferred upon them, Rom. viii. 29. However, let it be observed, that conformity to Christ lies not in mere suffering. It is not our being afflicted, but our bearing afflictions in a Christian manner, that makes us conformed to Jesus Christ. Hence the Apostle says, "Behold we count them happy which endure;" that is, who hold out with patience, resignation and resolution, still persevering in the exercise of grace, and in the practice of duty. There was a peculiar temper and disposition of mind appeared in Christ, through the whole scene of his suffering; and the more or less of that temper that the Christian discovers, under his trials, just so much the more or less is he conformed unto Jesus. When he left the world, as the apostles succeeded him in preaching the gospel, so they succeeded in suffering for the sake of it; and under their sufferings, they gave the world a very bright representation of their Master's temper. And truly, the first man that died in defence of Christianity, I mean Stephen, seems to be as much moulded into the spirit of his Master as any man could be. He left the world with a meekness and patience, and good will towards men, and even his enemies, much like to what the Redeemer discovered upon his leaving the world. The one said, "Father, forgive them,

for they know not what they do." The other, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

Thirdly, The afflictions occurring in the life of a Christian are for his advantage, because by them his graces are exercised and manifested. The stubbornness and rebellion of the Israelites in the wilderness, exercised and displayed the meekness of Moses. Neither had we heard so much of the patience of Job, if he had not laboured under a variety of the sorest calamities. The afflictions of good men not only discover the habit of grace in them, or show them to be gracious, but the graces which they have are brought forth into action. The rust and dimness which they contracted in time of peace, is rubbed off in the time of affliction, and they shine illustrious as arms in the day of battle. It is an honour to be called forth from the crowd, and made an object of admiration to angels, to the world, and to men. These blessed spirits above, behold with joy and admiration the faith, the hope, the patience, the meekness, and the resignation of the saints on earth under their trials. It is an honour to be called to give evidence of the power of the grace of God, and of the reality that is in the religion of Christ. There are many, whose names send forth a savoury perfume in the churches of Christ to this very day, who would have long since sunk in oblivion, had it not been for some eminent trial, wherewith they were exercised, and under which they eminently displayed the grace of God in them.

Fourthly, Whatever dismal apprehensions the Christian may have of the troubles in his life, they are for his good; because, often, they are the means of preventing much sin, that otherwise would be committed. It is oftentimes a mercy to the Lord's people, that their way is hedged up with thorns, otherwise they would break over and tread upon forbidden ground, Hos. ii. 6. and that there is a wall reared up, so that they cannot find their paths. When the Lord sends a cross to meet them, as he did Abigail to meet David, they may say with him, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me." That

meeting, you know, prevented much bloodshed and mischief, which David, in his wrath, designed against Nabal and his family. Thus, I say, the Lord makes the afflictions of his children serve to restrain corruption in them, which would otherwise break forth. One is in poverty and straits: the Lord, by these, prevents pride, oppression, and trusting in uncertain riches, which, perhaps, the Christian would have fallen into, if his circumstances had been better. Another complains of the loss of children, or other dear and useful relations, and says with Jacob, "all these things are against me." Why, it is likely, if these earthly comforts had been continued, they would have usurped God's room in the believer's heart; and if so great an evil was prevented by removing them, then, certainly, their death was for our good.

Fifthly, Trials in the life of the child of God are for his profit, because they crucify him unto the world, and all things therein. It is said of the Hebrews, that they "endured a great fight of affliction, and took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance:" Sanctified afflictions indeed! The people of God, as well as others, are too much inclined to take up their resting place on this side Jordan. They would fain settle in the wilderness, in some fits at least, without fighting their way through to the heavenly Canaan: therefore God makes thorns and briers to spring up in all those places they choose to rest in, that so they may arise and depart, saying, surely this is not our rest, because it is polluted. We are apt not only to groan, but to continue big with expectations from the creature, in the midst of repeated disappointments. We are still for hewing out the other cistern, and smiting the other rock, though the cistern holds no water, and though the rock flashes fire in our face, and burns it, instead of yielding water for our refreshment.

Now, as this earthly disposition is dishonouring to God, and prejudicial to the saints, so God makes use of afflictions to be the death of it. He exercises his people with

sore trials, perhaps both within and without, and continues them, so that they go all their days in the bitterness of their souls, and never eat their bread with pleasure. He suffers them to meet with one disappointment upon the back of another; so that they are at length, in a great measure, deadened to the world. Their expectations and affections are carried off it, and raised to heaven, to the more substantial and durable things within the vail. They look upon it as a crucified thing, as a flower which the Spirit of God has blown upon and blasted; and so they leave it in their affections and pursuits. They turn their backs upon it, and their faces are as though they would go up to Jerusalem. Now, certainly, that which produces such a notable effect as this, is good; and therefore, instead of saying with Jacob, "all these things are against me," the followers of the Lamb ought to say with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."

In the *sixth* place, The afflictions in the life of a believer are not against him, but for him, whatever he may apprehend; inasmuch as by these he gets a treasure of valuable experiences, Rom. v. 3, 4, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." Trials, especially if they be of any continuance, afford the children of God many experiences of his love, mercy, power, and faithfulness. In his love, and in his pity, he has frequently relieved them when they were sore oppressed. In his faithfulness, he has brought about the accomplishment of promises that seemed to be forgotten. His powerful arm has, before their eyes, given things that seemed desperate and hopeless, a surprising turn to the advantage. Thus the saints have frequent opportunities of observing how good and gracious the Lord is; and by these they come to a better understanding of his methods of providence, both towards the world in general, and towards particular persons, which seem strange unto such as never have observed them in their own case.

Moreover, in a long series of trials, they get many experiences of their own deceitful hearts, and though these be painful unto them, yet they are very profitable; for thus they learn when and where to be most upon their guard; and thus they are not in such danger, as those are who know the deceitfulness of their heart, only by speculation or report.

Again, Christians, in long afflictions, become acquainted with the power and craft of the grand adversary. Hence they are said "not to be ignorant of his devices." He is ready with his temptations at all times. In times of affliction he seeks to winnow: he is sure to come when the corn is under the flail. It is profitable to reflect on these experiences: by them the heart is filled with gratitude, and the Christian furnished with new matter for songs of praise.

Seventhly, The troubles of Christians are much to their advantage, because they tend to excite longing desires to be freed from the body of sin, and be ever with the Lord, where holiness shall be completed as well as happiness. They remember, that being in an imperfect state, they cannot be exempted from trouble. They are sensible, that the remainder of sin in them is the occasion of their being cast down, and made to lie as broken vessels among the pots; therefore they long for the approach of that day, when they shall be perfectly free of sin, and set down under the refreshing beams of the Sun of righteousness, that shall not be eclipsed through the long days of eternity.

In the *next* place, The afflictions of life do good to the Christian, by being the remembrancers of sin. As we are apt to forget God the law-giver, so we are very ready to forget our sins, which are the transgressions of that law. Now, afflictions readily bring them to remembrance, and that in two ways, 1st, In general. Were we not sinners, we would not be sufferers; for as sin brought death into the world, so it brought in afflictions, which are near a-kin to it: For whereas the former absolutely dissolves the frame of nature, so the other weakens and prepares it for dissolu-

tion. The effect naturally reminds us of the cause: so, when the Christian is under affliction, he is not only reminded of sin, but he may be led into such views of its nature, demerit, and consequences, as will be very profitable unto him. But, 2dly, They are not only remembrancers of sin in general, but they often bring some particular sins to the remembrance of the Christian. Thus it was with Joseph's brethren: the harsh treatment they met with in Egypt, brought their guilt concerning their brother fresh to their remembrance, Gen. xlii. 21. A guilty conscience is still jealous. An old sin, especially if it be of a heinous nature, often appears and haunts the sinner like a ghost, upon his meeting with new trials. The waves of guilt, and the waves of affliction meeting together, create a tempestuous sea in the soul. And if it be enquired how it is that afflictions bring particular sins to remembrance, I answer, in two things, 1st, As God does not afflict willingly, or for nought, so it is natural for the Christian to enquire into the cause; and upon enquiry he will readily fix upon some particular sin or sins in his life, the guilt of which oppresses him most. 2dly, There is often such an affinity betwixt the affliction and the sin thereby brought to remembrance, as that the former appears evidently to be the chastisement of the latter, as we see in the case of Adoni-bezek, Judg. i. 7. Now, it is profitable to the Christian to have some particular sins brought to remembrance by affliction, though they be long since pardoned; for this causes him to repeat his esteem of the atonement made by Christ, to renew his repentance, to double his diligence, and to be more and more watchful.

Ninthly, The difficulties of the Christian are by no means against him, but much to his advantage, as they afford an opportunity of displaying unto him the glory of the divine attributes, which are especially concerned in supporting him under his afflictions, and delivering him from them at last. It was upon this account, that the great apostle Paul gloried, and took pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, and distresses. These things considered in themselves,

could never be pleasant to any man; but considered as means of displaying the divine power, wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness, they are both pleasant and profitable to the real Christian.

How gloriously does God display his power in the afflictions of his people? how often is the strength of the strength of Israel made perfect in them? He giveth power to the faint, and unto them that have no might, he increaseth strength, and enables them to bear such burdens, as makes them a wonder not only unto many, but even unto themselves. His power shines in restraining Satan, who seeks to winnow them; in restraining their own corruptions, which would lead them to murmur; and in restraining the power of the men of the world, who would oppress them.

How glorious an appearance does the wisdom of God make in the field of the Christian's afflictions? He shows himself a skilful physician, in making up the medicines of his people. He knows our frame: he remembers we are but dust: he is well acquainted with the delicate constitution of the new creature in the Christian, and so he makes every dispensation issue in the strengthening of it. What a joyful prospect of the manifold wisdom of God would Jacob have, after he and his family were carried down to Egypt, when he saw his son Joseph not only alive, but living in honour next to the king. And the rejoicing views which Joseph himself had of the divine wisdom, throughout the whole scene, may be learned from what he says to his brethren, after his father's death, when they were afraid, that he would avenge himself upon them.

The faithfulness of God is also displayed amidst the difficulties of a believer, as in the case of Abraham, the father of the faithful. After the promise was confirmed unto Isaac, that in him his seed should be called, the promise-maker commands him to do that which, in all appearance, would absolutely frustrate the promise. He commands Abraham, with his own hand, to slay his son, the

son of the promise, and offer him up a sacrifice, which was as much as if he had bidden him kill the Messiah, and deprive the world of a Saviour: yet, out of that dark dispensation, there arose unto Abraham the greatest glory of the divine faithfulness that ever appeared, until the actual coming of the Messiah.

And as for the divine mercy: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him;" so that, with the Psalmist, they may sing aloud of his mercy. Now every body must allow, that such manifestations of the divine perfections are very profitable to the Christian; and if so, he cannot in justice say, that afflictions, which are the occasions of them, are against him.

Tenthly, Afflictions are for the advantage of the children of God, because, under them, they are allowed sometimes more than ordinary communion with God. I do not say that this is the Christian's ordinary allowance: nay, sometimes the want of this is his greatest trial. But sometimes the Lord causes light to arise in the midst of darkness: he communicates unto them such degrees of light, life and comfort, that their inward man has been revived, renewed, and refreshed to a wonder. Thus it was with holy Jacob when he had wrestled all the night with the angel, even to the disjoining of his thigh. He gave the place a new name, calling it Peniel, "for," says he, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." This, you know, was at a time, when the patriarch was in great fear that his brother Esau would make an attack upon him, and smite him, as he expresses it, and the mother with the children. The Psalmist also gives testimony to this, when he says, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." And thus has it been with many of the Lord's people; he has made all their bed in their sickness, so that it has been soft, and sweet, and easy unto them. They have felt his left hand under their head, and his right hand embracing them. They have got such manifestations of his love, his grace, his glory, and such clear evidences of their special interest

in his favour, that they have been made to say with David, "It was good for me that I was afflicted."

But, further, the trials of the children of God are greatly for their profit, as they are the means of making them walk more closely and humbly with God, all their days. Thus good king Hezekiah, when he was recovered out of that sickness which was likely to be unto death, resolved to give glory to God, by walking softly all the remainder of his days. David, in his prosperity, said, "I shall never be moved;" and it was very foolishly said. But in the day of adversity he considered better, and learned to know in whom his standing was. Sanctified afflictions make a strong believer. Job winds up his case unto a supposition of being killed out-right, and even then he resolves to cleave unto the Lord. And as they make a strong, so they make a humble and self-denied believer. The Lord schooled Job, until he made him vile in his own eyes. Nay, my brethren, take for confirmation of what I say, the great example of the Son of God. Who among the saints, who among the sons of men, had difficulties, trials and afflictions, any way equal to his? yet never was faith carried so high, nor humility so deep, as in him. His faith conflicted with the pain, the shame, the ignominy of the cross; yea, which was worse than any or all of these, with the wrath and desertion of his holy Father, and yet it was victorious over them all.

In the *last* place, The difficulties which occur in the life of the Christian in this world, are much to his advantage; for they will make the rest above more sweet and refreshing unto him. There will certainly be a sweetness and refreshment in the heaven of afflicted believers, that would not have been in the heaven of Adam, supposing him to have stood in innocence. Meat has a peculiar relish to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty. Rest is not so refreshing to any as to the labouring man. And doubtless, the heaven of rest on the other side Jordan, will be the more acceptable unto the saints, that they are for a season sore tossed on the tempestuous sea of life.

Before I proceed to the application, let me shortly enquire, Whence it is that Christians are so apt to mistake the designs of providence towards them, in the difficulties and trials which befall them on earth, saying with Jacob, as in my text, "all these things are against me."

First, This proceeds from unbelief, which is a teeming womb of fears and jealousies of God. Though there is not in real saints an evil heart of unbelief, yet there is much unbelief in their hearts: and their unbelief is the most malignant member of the whole body of sin. It is a whisperer, that deals in separating chief friends. It casts mist and dust, and darkness upon the mind of the Christian, so that he cannot discern the kindness and good will of God often towards him, in the dispensations of his providence. The conduct of the Israelites in the wilderness, is a plain proof of the power of unbelief. Though they were guilty of many other sins, yet unbelief was the original of them all, and the procuring cause of their judgments. The Apostle expressly declares, they entered not into the earthly Canaan, because of unbelief. They were never reduced to any straits, but they fell a murmuring against God, and against Moses. Their unbelief made them doubt about every thing. Hear their provoking questions; "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people?" Sinful and shameful questions! especially considering what proofs of the divine power had been gotten by those who proposed them. Take heed, then, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God: for if unbelief have the ascendant in the soul, and be allowed to judge in the conduct of providence, it will be sure to give in a verdict to the dishonour of God, and the discouragement of your souls.

Secondly, The people of God are apt to mistake the designs of providence towards them, from ignorance of his complex plan. "God's way are in the seas; his paths in the deep waters; and his footsteps are not known; yet all his ways are perfect; he is a God of truth, and without

iniquity ; just and right is he." We see this and the other dispensation of providence as it falls out, and we judge of it by itself, without considering its connexion with the whole scheme. Take that dispensation, the selling of Joseph into the hands of the Ishmaelitish merchants by itself, and you cannot see how it could work either for his own good, or for the good of his father's family ; but take it, in connexion with the other turns of providence in Joseph's history, and you will readily perceive, as Joseph owns, that God meant it for good.

There is a close connexion, a beautiful harmony, among all the dispensations of providence. God acts consistently with himself, and consistently with the good of his people ; and therefore, when there appears any inconsistency in his conduct to us, we should be sure to impute this to our own ignorance, and not unto him, who does all things well.

In the *last* place, Our mistaking the designs of God in adverse dispensations, is partly owing to a conviction of guilt. We are all sinful creatures. Fears and jealousies are the inseparable attendants of sin. Hence we take the alarm, when we meet with cross events of providence, and are apt to imagine that a design for our hurt is laid against us. We are conscious to ourselves that we have offended God, and that we justly deserve his wrath, and so we are ready to suspect, that the cross dispensations which befall us, come as the punishment of a judge, and not as the chastisement of a father.

I pass on now to the Improvement.

First, From this doctrine we learn, that the men of the world have no reason to triumph over the saints of God, in their calamities. David's enemies insulted over him, in his distress, saying, "The Lord hath forsaken him ; persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him." So foolish are they, and unacquainted with the ways of God, that they take outward prosperity to be a badge of the special favour of heaven, and therefore they said to David, when matters went cross with him, "Where is thy God ?" To which it may be answered, our God is in the heaven,

in the earth, and everywhere, except in the hearts of those who propose such a question; and they shall find him there at last, if they amend not their ways.

Let not then the wicked triumph over the saints of the Most High, for he will never leave them, nor forsake them. Though he may suspend the sensible manifestations of his love for a season, yet the love itself changeth not, but, like God himself, is invariably the same. Though he may change the course of his providence towards them, as to outward things, they shall be made better, and not worse by the change.

Secondly, If all things issue in the good of the Christian, we infer, that all things must work for the ruin of the ungodly. In reference hereunto, we may observe what the Apostle says to Titus, "Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, is nothing pure." The wicked are like filthy vessels, which defile everything that is put into them. As a foul stomach turns the wholesomest food into noxious humours, so the best things which the wicked enjoy, are by themselves abused unto their ruin.

All the ordinances of the gospel work for their destruction. Christ is himself a stumbling block to them. His word is unto them the savour of death unto death. His ministers work upon them, according to that commission, Isa. vi. 10, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert and be healed." Every step of providence towards them helps on their destruction. If they are in adversity, God is their adversary. If they pass under the rod, they are not within the bond of the covenant. If they are in prosperity, their table becomes a snare unto them. Their fellowship both with saints and sinners, is to their hurt. If their days upon earth are lengthened out, it is that they may fill up the measure of their iniquity.

Thirdly, From this doctrine, we may learn the comfortable state of the true Christian, in every situation. Let

me here adopt a line out of Moses' farewell sermon, to the tribes and people of Israel. "Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency. All things shall work together for your good." If you are in prosperity, you shall not be destroyed by it like the foolish. If you suffer affliction on your bodies, on your souls, on your good names, on your relations, or any thing else, be not afraid; say not with Jacob, "all these things are against me." All is well with you, and shall be well. My brethren, here is soul-quieting doctrine, under all the convulsions and commotions that are or may be in the world, or the church. Here is solid ground for absolute resignation to the will of God, in all the events of his providence. Choose not, therefore, for yourselves; but let God, as good reason is, choose for you, and rest quietly in the choice he makes. Resignation, under the most cross dispensations, would have been your indispensable duty, although God had not told you, how much good he designs to you by them. Since, then, he has informed you of this, how inexcusable will you be, if you rebel? how aggravated will your murmuring be? O then be still, and know that he is God.

In the *last* place, This doctrine lays a foundation for rejoicing under the greatest tribulations. "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice." However singular the trials of believers are, with whatever heightening circumstances they are attended, why should you be discouraged, after you have heard from the mouth of the Lord, how much the worst of them are to your advantage; "Therefore lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees. Why lie you thus upon your faces? up and be doing; the Lord is with you; the Lord is before you; the Lord is on every side."

SERMON VII.

THE NATURE OF AND OBLIGATIONS TO RESIGNATION TO THE WILL OF GOD.

2 SAM. xv. 26.—“ But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.”

IN the preceding sermon you have heard, that all the tribulations of the people of God are for their good, and how they are so, whatever discouraging apprehensions they may have of them. If this be so, then, doubtless, it is their duty to be absolutely resigned unto the divine disposal in everything. Of this we have a notable example in the words of our text. David is here in great distress, by means of his son's unnatural rebellion. He finds it necessary to fly from Jerusalem. The priests and Levites accompany him in his flight, and they carry the ark along with them, that by it they might ask counsel of God for him. He had a great concern for the safety of the ark, and therefore orders it back to Jerusalem. None loved the ark and ordinances of the Lord better than he; but since Jerusalem was, by divine appointment, the place for the abode of the ark, he will have it carried back thither; and if the Lord should be pleased to return him to the crown, to the city, to the ark and ordinances of divine worship, well; but if otherwise, he is resigned to the divine disposal: “ Let him do to me what seemeth good unto him.”

In the words you have two things, 1st, A supposition, and a very afflicting one, namely, that God might see it meet never to restore him to his kingdom, nor to the ark and ordinances of the Lord, but that he might be slain, or obliged to skulk in some corner of the world the remain-

der of his days. 2dly, You have the conclusion he makes upon this supposition; and it is indeed a very good one. He resolves, through grace, to be absolutely resigned to the sovereign will of God. And it is well expressed here, "Let him do to me what seemeth good unto him." He puts himself in the posture of a servant, waiting his master's orders. He considers God's absolute sovereignty, and thereupon commands his soul into silence. Says he, I have nothing to object, all is good to me that seems good to him. Observe with what complacency and holy satisfaction he speaks of the divine disposal. Not only he can do what he will, subscribing to his power; or, he may do what he will, saying amen to his sovereignty; or, he will do what he will, resting in his unchangeableness; but let him do what he will, approving of the wisdom of his disposals.

DOCTRINE. It is the duty of all, and the disposition of the saints, to be resigned unto the divine disposal in everything.

I shall, *first*, mention some things that are no way inconsistent with absolute resignation to God.

First, For a Christian to be sensibly touched with afflicting events, is by no means inconsistent with it. The design of Christianity is not to root out our affections, but to regulate them. Our Lord himself was most sensibly affected with the bitterness of the cup which his Father gave him to drink. He was in an agony; his soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. But, notwithstanding all this commotion of affections in him, there was no irregularity, no rebellion or murmuring, no flinching from obedience to every point of his Father's will. When he makes a supposition of the cup passing from him, he qualifies it thus; "nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."

Some, among the heathens of old, affected a stoical apathy, a sullen carelessness about all the afflictions which befell them, death itself not excepted; and for this they were highly applauded by others as ignorant of God as

themselves. It was called heroism and greatness of spirit : but, in reality, it was cowardice and baseness of spirit. Such behaviour was so far from being the effect of a truly humbled spirit, which is the only great spirit, that it was the effect of the most insufferable pride and contempt, both of God and his providence. Something of this behaviour appeared among the Jews in Isaiah's time ; and we find the Lord imputes it to the pride and stoutness of their hearts, Isa. ix. 9, 10, " And all the people shall know, even Ephraim, and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of their heart, the bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars." That is, providence has blasted this project, but no matter, we will form a better, and be sure to succeed. Therefore, as we must guard on the one hand, against fainting, when we are rebuked of the Lord, so we must guard, on the other, against despising his chastening. We may groan and be grieved, provided we do not grudge and murmur. We may be sorrowful, but not sullen and obstinate.

Secondly, For a Christian to search into the cause of the Lord's contending with him, is very consistent with absolute resignation to his will. Job says, chap. x. 2, " Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." The Lord does not afflict willingly, not grieve the children of men ; that is, there is a cause for every twig of the rod ; and therefore the Christian, under the mighty hand of God, may and ought to reflect upon his former ways, and see if he can find out what part of his conduct has provoked the Lord to lift up his hand against him, that so he may take the rebuke, and amend his ways. But when people search into the dispensations of providence, in the bitterness of their spirits, when they ask reasons of the divine conduct in such and such particulars, because they think it hard and unreasonable, then rebellion has the ascendant of resignation : there is an uproar and mutiny in the soul, by unmortified lusts. Examples of which we have in Job ; " Why died I not from the womb ? why did I not give up

the ghost when I came out of the belly? why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck?" Such questions, and such reasonings, were not becoming one in his circumstances. The good man Asaph offended in this way also, as we see in the seventy-third Psalm.

Thirdly, For a Christian to desire and pray for deliverance from trouble, is no way inconsistent with resignation to the divine disposal. Indeed, to pray absolutely for exemption from trouble while we are in this world, is not agreeable to the will of God, nor is there any instance of this in scripture, and so it can never be accepted of God: and to pray positively, without making a reserve to the wise disposal of God, for deliverance from any particular trial, has as little of the Christian in it as the former, and must sound ungratefully in the ears of the hearer of prayer.

But it is not unbecoming, nor unusual, for Christians of the first rank for resignation, to beg of God that he would deliver them from some particular distresses and trials they labour under. We have frequent examples of this in David, in his Book of Psalms. Sometimes we find him pleading very earnestly with God for relief, and yet still leaving a full latitude to sovereignty. Thus, in the thirty-ninth Psalm, "Remove thy stroke away from me, I am consumed by the blow of thine hand." And again, "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more." But that he was resigned in all these petitions, appears from ver. 9th, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." We have the greatest of all examples for this, in the conduct of the Son of God, John xii. 27, "Father, save me from this hour:" but at the same time, he shows his resigned temper of soul, and full resolution to go through with the work he had undertaken; "but for this cause came I unto this hour." And again, "Father, if thou be willing, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." Thus you see the Christian may pray, and that earnestly, for the removal of his trouble; but still he must, in his heart, be resigned to the holy and wise disposal of God.

Fourthly, For the Christian to use all lawful means for deliverance from any particular trouble, is perfectly consistent with absolute resignation to divine providence. Thus, when the Christian is in bodily distress, and threatened with the dissolution of his frame, although he must be resigned to the will of God, either as to living or dying, yet it is his duty to use all suitable means for restoring himself to health again. Timothy, who it seems was of a tender and delicate constitution, is exhorted by Paul, to use a little wine for his stomach's sake, and his often infirmities. To use the means is our duty; to be resigned to the will of God with respect to the success of it, is also a duty: and, since they are both duties, the one cannot be inconsistent with the other.

I may add, in the *last* place, That frequent sallies of fretting are not inconsistent with habitual resignation to the will of God. I speak not this to extenuate the sin of murmuring, which is certainly a very great one, and must be very provoking to God, but for the encouragement of some of God's own children, who may be sore cast down, because of their unsubdued spirit, and the occasional eruption of their passion. Such sallies, we see, are incident to the best of saints. Job, whom the Holy Ghost in the New Testament celebrates for his patience, had several impatient fits, and bitter expressions under them, as may be seen in his book. Asaph, in his haste, uttered some indecent, yea, atheistical expressions; yet Job was a resigned saint, and Asaph a believer both in God and his providence.

I proceed, in the *second* place, To open the nature of this absolute resignation to the disposal of God.

First, It implies an approbation of the divine conduct, in the whole and every part of it, as holy and good. If you would know, what is the settled judgment of the Christian, about the conduct of God towards himself or others, we will deliver it in the Psalmist's words, Psal. xviii. 30, "As for God, his way is perfect." In the preceding part of the Psalm, he is giving a narrative of some very strange events; and to prevent any unbecoming reflections that

others might make upon them, he delivers his own opinion concerning them in these words, "As for God, his way is perfect." Moses, for a long course of years, had been a spectator of the divine providence. He had seen surprising dispensations both of mercy and judgment; and in his last song he delivers his opinion about them: "He is the rock, his way is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity: just and right is he."

The resigned Christian, then, is one who thinks well of God, and approves of his conduct as holy, just, and good, though it be deep and mysterious to him. He will not take upon him to prescribe rules and methods to the only wise God, like the murmuring unmanageable souls, who are full of big swelling reasonings against God and his providence. Oh how many are the sophisms of unbelief! The solid reasonings of faith say, "He hath done all things well."

Secondly, In this Christian resignation, there is an heart-love to the whole, and every part of the divine conduct.

The mind may judge a thing to be right, and the will may comply with it, while, at the same time, there may be the greatest reluctance in the affections. But, as the resigned soul loves the economy of grace, so it loves the economy of providence. The Christian does, with the greatest pleasure and satisfaction, behold his Father's wise and holy hand, moving all the wheels of providence. And thus he gets and maintains a calm mind, under the most terrible dispensations.

In the *third* place, In this resignation there is a cheerful compliance with all the disposals of providence. The child of God says, after the example of his elder brother, "not my will but thine be done;" and with the chief Apostle, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" what will thou have me to deny? what wilt thou have me so suffer? Give but the word of command, make but the least intimation of what is thy will, and, through grace, mine shall not only acquiesce, but cheerfully comply. No doubt, David loved

the crown of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, the ark of God, and the ordinances of his worship; but if it was the will of God that he should enjoy them no longer, he was ready to comply.

But, concerning this resignation, let the following things be more particularly observed.

First, The subject of Christian resignation, is an heart born again by the Spirit of God. It is one of the graces of the Spirit; but no man hath these graces of the Spirit, but he who is born of the Spirit, and in whom the Spirit dwells. All the graces of the Spirit of God have their counterfeits in hypocrites. As there is a false faith, a false hope, a false joy, so there is a false resignation, which hypocrites are possessed of; something that bears the semblance of true resignation, and passes for it among men. Thus, the sullen and indifferent behaviour of some heathens, under severe calamities, was cried up, by their ignorant admirers, as resignation and patience: whereas God, who searches the heart, saw pride and obstinacy to be the springs of their behaviour. We must conclude, that whatever may look like resignation among men, arising from a natural sweetness of temper, or whatever advantages some may have for the practice of it, arising from constitution or example, yet that resignation, which is in the sight of God of great price, is as much a work of his Spirit as faith or any other grace. None but such can be loyal subjects in the kingdom of God. All others are malcontents: and, from their nature, must be so. It was a most blasphemous speech of one, that if he had been in the divine counsel, he would have ordered things much better than he thought God had done: and yet that poor miscreant did but speak out, what secretly lurks in the hearts of all natural men. We may lay it down as a certain rule, that whosoever are not the subjects of God's kingdom of grace, can never be dutiful subjects in his kingdom of providence. A man who is not pleased with the grace of God, will never be pleased with his providence, except in so far as it enables him to please his own self-

will. Providence, then, which contradicts the rebel's self-will, may break his back; but it is only the grace of God which can bow his heart, into a cheerful compliance with the divine will. When Paul became a subject of the kingdom of grace, his first petition was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Secondly, The proper object of Christian resignation is God in Christ. The object of the heathen's resignation, such as it was, was God absolutely considered. A sinner out of Christ, who apprehends God as his enemy, may indeed, in a sense, submit to his will, just as the malefactor submits to the sentence of his judge, because there is no possibility of avoiding it: whereas the real Christian not only submits to the will of God, because it cannot be resisted, but, by grace, his spirit is brought to a complacency in it: for he considers it as the will of God in Christ, breathing not only a display of the wisdom and power of God, but good to him; and so he would not wish it to be otherwise. Paul lays it down for certain, that "all things shall work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to his propose." Try then the reality of your resignation by the object of it. Do you resign yourselves to God, absolutely considered, or to God in Christ, as your God.

Thirdly, The extent of Christian resignation is unto all things. The Christian has no reserve: he does not except against any part of the will of God, either as to doing or suffering. The hypocrite would be content to resign himself in some things to the will of God, that is, in such things as do not cross his own will; which is by no means acceptable resignation. The murmurers think they could be resigned to any dispensation but the present, and so they are never easy: whereas the true Christian preserves a serene mind under every dispensation; for he reckons himself in the hands of a friend, wise to contrive, powerful to execute, and faithful to fulfil whatever is for his good.

But it may be useful to be more particular here.

In the *first* place, then, The Christian is resigned to the

will of God, with respect to his station and calling in the world. The great Governor of the world allots unto men their several posts and stations in life. Men, therefore, ought to show their resignation to him in these, by resting satisfied with their outward condition whatever it be. The various conditions of life are like so many seats placed one above another, whereof God hath the disposal. He calls one man, and sets him high, and another beneath him; the third lower still, and so on as it pleaseth him. Now, it is the duty, and the disposition of every true Christian, to be perfectly pleased with the seat assigned him, be it high or low, till God say, arise and go up higher, or arise and come down lower, or arise and give up thy accounts.

Secondly, The Christian is resigned to the will of God, with respect to his gifts. "There are diversities of gifts, though there be but one Spirit;" and his wisdom and sovereignty are very brightly displayed in bestowing these. To one is given, by the Spirit, the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge, and so on. Now, it is the duty of the Christian, unto whom the Spirit has distributed more sparingly, to be resigned to the will of God in this matter; and to occupy with what God gives him, and not to envy others on account of their superior abilities. For be his station in the body of Christ never so low, it is both honourable and necessary.

Thirdly, He is resigned to God, with respect to his constitution and health. Health is, so to speak, the sauce of our earthly enjoyments. Without it everything of this kind loses its relish, and many of them become nauseous. Some are of a robust constitution, and little know what trouble is. Others, like Timothy, have their often infirmities. The Lord is the maker of them both. He lodges one soul in a strong, another in a weak tabernacle, as it seemeth good unto him: and therefore it is the duty of every Christian, to be pleased with that body, in which his Sovereign hath lodged his soul.

Fourthly, The people of God are resigned to his will, with

respect to the measure of comfort they are to draw out of earthly things. Houses, lands, riches, friends, and all other things, are neither less nor more to us, than what God makes them. Hence, Solomon observes, that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." He puts every degree of innocent pleasure into these things, which they severally convey. Hence, from the same object, you have sometimes comfort, and sometimes bitterness. God holds the scales in his hand, and weighs out comfort at one time, and sorrow at another time, and that from the same earthly thing.

Fifthly, He is resigned, with respect to esteem and reputation in the world. A good name is as precious ointment, much to be desired; but, in the depths of sovereign wisdom, it sometimes falls out, that a good man's maintaining the truth, and maintaining a good name in the world, are inconsistent. Thus it was with our Saviour himself. How unsavoury was his name among the Jews? what reproaches did they cast upon him? The Apostles after him, were looked upon as seditious persons: they lost their good name, but it was in a good cause, even the cause of truth; and so they lost it cheerfully.

Sixthly, Believers are resigned to the will of God, as to all the afflictions which befall them in the course of their lives; and this takes in various things. They are resigned with respect to the kind of their afflictions. Heaven is the workshop, so to speak, where crosses are made; and there are various kinds of them: but were the resigned Christian to have them all laid before him, and allowed to lift any one of them that he thought himself best able to bear, he would absolutely decline choosing for himself, and humbly desire of the Lord, that he would choose for him; and in doing so, he would discover much wisdom as well as resignation: for never was a stone in the building more fit for its place, than the cross chosen by the Lord for the shoulders of the Christian who bears it.

They are resigned, with respect to the measure of afflictions. As we are not to choose the kind, neither are we

to choose the degree of our troubles. Two Christians may have each a trial of the same kind, and yet the trial of the one may be to a far greater degree than that of the other. God, in his wisdom, infuses more gall and wormwood into one cup than into another: but he who has the bitterest cup, if he is truly resigned, will say, after the example of his elder brother, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

Christians are resigned, in respect of the multitude of their troubles. The Psalmist says, "many are the troubles of the righteous:" what he adds is very comfortable: "but the Lord delivereth them out of them all." Jacob, Job, David, and other Scripture saints, were exercised with a multitude of afflictions. Sometimes they rolled thick upon them, like one wave upon the back of another: and this is the lot of some valuable Christians still. They go always bowed down. There is no period of life, but what is filled up with a variety of trials. This is a proper field for resignation to display its strength and activity in.

Again, Real Christians are resigned, as to the continuance of their trials. Some are afflicted in one period of their lives, and some in another, and some all the days of their appointed time. If it is the will of God, that we shall have no respite, till we lie down in our graves, we must lay our hands on our mouths, and say, good is the will of the Lord, let it be done.

In the *last* place, Believers are resigned to the will of God, with respect to their removal out of this world: and this is a matter of very great consequence. It is a piece of the mystery, and of the trial of faith, that the Christian's way to heaven should be through death and the grave: that after a stormy and tempestuous life, he must set his feet into the cold and deep waters of Jordan, before he can tread upon the promised land. The Christian is resigned with respect to death, absolutely considered, as it is a separation of the essential parts of human nature, soul and body. Death has carried on a war against human nature, ever since sin invaded it; and since there is no

discharge in that warfare, the Christian resolves to engage in it, hoping to be victorious through his Redeemer. The Christian is resigned, with respect to the manner of his death, whether it be natural or violent, sudden or lingering. Paul speaks out a resigned temper in this matter, Acts xxi. 13, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." He remembered how cheerfully Christ had died for him at Jerusalem; and now he is ready to die for Christ there also. God hath appointed but one way of coming into the world, but there are various ways of going out of it: but it is no great matter with the Christian which way he go out of it, if he gets safely to his Father's house at last. He is resigned also, as to the time of his death. Jacob, the heir of the promise, is starved almost for want of bread in the land of promise, and is obliged to remove with his family into Egypt, where he dies, and leaves his family to be sore and long oppressed. Moses dies on mount Nebo, after he had seen the promised land, and was told he should never set his foot on it. David must be content to leave the world, without seeing a stone laid in the temple of his God, though he had gotten the pattern of it, and provided materials for it. Good king Josiah must die in the field of battle, for not hearkening to the words of Necho from the mouth of God. It is an happy thing for believers, that their times are wholly in the hand of God: that he has the sole power of retaining and dismissing their spirits. Were people allowed to choose the time of their leaving the world, what disorder would it occasion? Some would be for staying longer in the world than God has use for them; and others would be for going away, before they had finished their day as an hireling. In a fit of grief, or hour of temptation, they would cry out with Job, "to be hid in the grave," though God had more work to be accomplished by them. The real Christian resolves to be still doing, till the great Master say, stop: then he cheerfully resigns his saved soul into the hands of God his Saviour.

We proceed now to enquire, why we should be thus ab-

solutely resigned unto the divine disposal in all things. And,

First, We should be so, because he is God, and there is none else besides him. This is a reason assigned by God himself, and therefore it should have weight with us, Psal. xlv. 10, "Be still, and know that I am God." When Manasseh was under affliction, and got good by it, it is said, that then he "knew that the Lord he was God." One great lesson to be learned in the school of affliction is, to know God; and it is long before we learn this aright. If we did, we should not be so stiff-necked and rebellious, under his holy hand. If you ask, what is God? Any body will answer, he is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, and so on. But if they really believed him to be what they call him, would they have such a world of difficulties in committing all unto his disposal? No surely. Is it meet to be said to this God, what doest thou? or why doest thou thus? For he giveth not account of any of his matters. Does it become any of us to say, why are my comforts taken from me, while the comforts of others are continued with them? why is my way to the kingdom through thorns and briers, while others ride upon high places? why do others walk in the light, and in perfect calm, while I go mourning without the sun? Are these, and such as these, becoming questions to be put to the Most High? Know you not that all these things, whereof you unjustly complain, are the wondrous doings of the Lord, and therefore challenge your absolute resignation. The great ones of the earth have their special favourites, whom they love and honour above others, and they must not be quarrelled for this. They claim as a privilege, to choose their favourites, and to dispense their favours as they please. If it be thus among men, will we not leave God to the same liberty? must men prescribe to him, or arraign his procedure at their bar? or, shall those who deserve nothing complain, because they enjoy not everything? My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Secondly, We ought to be resigned, because he is the

Creator, and we are the workmanship of his hands. "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker. Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say unto him that fashioneth it, what makest thou? or thy work, he hath no hands? Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" Be thou never so high, never so far exalted above thy fellow creatures, thou art still but a man: why then wilt thou exalt thyself above God, secretly quarrelling with his conduct, and prescribing rules to him? See how God humbles the prince of Tyrus, when he was swelled with pride like the foam of the sea, Ezek. xxviii. 6, "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore, I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas." We were merely passive in our first formation; and it is highly reasonable, that in God's management of us, we should be also passive; not offering to choose for ourselves, but resting in the choice of God, be what it will. True Christians say, in the language of the Psalmist in the forty-seventh Psalm, "He shall choose our inheritance for us."

Thirdly, God is the sovereign disposer of all things. He is clothed not only with omnipotency, whereby he can do everything, but also with sovereignty, whereby he may do whatever he pleases. As the potter, he has power over the clay, to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour. "He does in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, what seems good unto him." None can defeat his counsels. He sways an uncontrollable sceptre over all that are in heaven, earth or hell. "And who art thou that resistest his will? thou whose breath is in thy nostrils, and art in no way to be accounted of!" what an inconsiderable creature art thou, among the multitude of beings that are the subjects of Zion's king!

Lastly, We ought to be absolutely resigned to God, be-

cause he is the best disposer of all things. The whole household of faith assent to this: he doth all things well. We know not what is best for us, and yet we are fond of choosing for ourselves. The great Pilot of the creation steers always a right course for carrying the passengers to glory. "As for him, his way is perfect, though it be in the deep waters. Though clouds and darkness be round about him, justice and judgment are the habitations of his throne." The whole economy of providence is directed by unerring wisdom, tempered with mercy and truth to them that fear God. And in the issue, all things shall be found to have wrought together for their good.

Now, as resignation is the duty of all, so it is the disposition of the saints in particular: For,

1st, Resignation is a part of the new nature, formed in them by the Holy Ghost. Hence, as I observed before, it is ranked among the fruits of the Spirit, Gal. v. 22, 23. and can be in none but those, in whom the Spirit has begun that good work of grace, which shall be perfected in glory. The new creature is by nature a meek, quiet, and resigned creature; even as the old man is by nature an untame, fierce, and rebellious creature.

Resignation is as essential a part of the new nature, as rebellion is of the old; and therefore it is and must be the disposition of every saint.

2dly, This resignation is an eminent piece of conformity to Jesus Christ: and that, you know, is the earnest desire, the interest, the honour, as well as the indispensable duty of all his saints, Phil. ii. 5. 1 John ii. 6. Nothing appeared more gloriously in Christ, than resignation to his Father's will. This grace, this duty was exemplified by him, both in his doing and suffering; and it was warmly inculcated by him upon his disciples. Now, if this be so, what sort of Christians must those be, who are not habitually resigned to the will of God, but constantly disposed to quarrel and censure his ways as unequal? They contradict the precept and example of Christ, and so blaspheme that worthy name by which they are called.

3dly, We find the saints recorded in scripture to have been thus disposed: not but that they sometimes rebelled and murmured under the hand of the Lord. But, then, this was not their habitual temper and practice: this they did not allow in themselves; nay, they condemned it in themselves, and were grieved for it; witness Asaph in the 73d Psalm. They were so far from priding themselves in it, that they were pained for it, and mourned over it before the Lord. Therefore, when we meet with any bitter expressions about the conduct of providence, uttered by any of the saints in scripture, as Job and others, we must consider them as uttered in their haste, and in the heat of temptation, and not as their settled judgment about the divine conduct.

Lastly, This resignation to the divine will, is an eminent piece of sanctification. David could not have said any thing that savoured more of a spirit of holiness, than the words of the text; "Lo, here am I, let him do to me what seemeth good unto him." All the graces of the Spirit, such as faith, love, joy, patience, are so closely connected with resignation, that they cannot be in any person without it.

I proceed now to the application.

Is it the duty of all, and the disposition of the saints, to be absolutely resigned to the will of God? Then,

1st, This doctrine reproves all those who censure the ways of God as unequal, because they cannot or will not see the reason of them. This was the sin of Israel, Ezek. xviii. 29, "Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal, are not your ways unequal?" Nothing could have been said more false and injurious, being a flat contradiction to what David said by the Spirit, concerning the way of God, "His way is perfect," Psal. xviii. 30. And the Lord refutes the vile calumny cast upon his ways, by a solemn appeal to the consciences of the calumniators, wherein he desires them to consider his ways and their own ways, that they might take their censure off the

former, and lay it upon the latter, where it justly deserved to lie.

My brethren, call not the ways of God unequal, because they lie not square with the perverse wills of men. They are perfectly agreeable unto the eternal rule of righteousness, and unto the eternal decree, whereof they are the accomplishment.

2dly, This doctrine reproves murmurers and fretters, under cross events of providence. Murmurers and complainers, you see, are put in a very black roll, Jude ver. 16. They are the persons upon whom the Lord is to execute judgment; and they deserve it very justly: for, after a sort, they set up themselves as dictators to the only wise God. They are not satisfied with the divine conduct, either towards themselves or others. They misconstrue not only the mysterious, but likewise the plain and easy events of providence. Any dispensation but the present, they think, would be tolerable. In short, your murmurers are the most unmanageable creatures in all the divine dominions. They cannot please God, and God cannot please them; and so they live in a constant war against heaven, and behave, as if they had put on a resolution always to oppose the will of God.

3dly, This doctrine reproves those who use undue means to better their outward condition, as fraud, oppression, injustice, anxious carefulness, and the like. Such persons are not satisfied with God's allowance. They are not content with their present condition; and this is a great sin, though it is very little thought of, because it is so common. It may be called "Gad, for a troop cometh." It is a teeming womb of sins, and those of a very heinous nature.

Let me therefore exhort you to an absolute resignation unto the divine disposal in everything: and, to enforce it, I offer these motives following.

1st, Consider the absolute sovereignty of God, whose are all things, and who may dispose of them as he pleases. May not I do with mine own what I please, is a style in which none may speak but Jehovah, who sits upon the

circle of the earth, while the inhabitants of it are as grasshoppers before him. Now, unto holy souls there is a shining beauty in sovereignty. We read but once of our Saviour's rejoicing in spirit: and the occasion of it was remarkable, namely, a display of his Father's sovereignty, Matt. xi. 25. The mysteries of grace as well as the mysteries of providence, must be resolved into the sovereign will of God. Why was Jacob chosen, and Esau rejected? Why was the gospel revealed unto babes, that is, unto poor, weak, and despised persons, while it was hid from the great ones of the world, the men of parts and power? Why are we privileged with the means of grace, while others, partaking of the same human nature, are sunk in the darkness of ignorance? Why, all these are the doings of him who giveth not account of his matters. Why was this part of the creation an angel, that a man, and this a worm? Not from their own choice; but, merely, because the sovereign Lord would have it so. Why are some kingdoms of the world razed, and others raised? Why are some families flourishing, while others are fading? Why are some healthy, while others are sore troubled? How is it that heavy calamities befall some, while others escape, who have no title to heaven's special favour? The reason is still the same; "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight."

2dly, Consider the absolute power of God. Job ix. 4, "He is mighty in strength." The greatest men in the world have a prescribed power: there are bounds and limits set unto it. Thus far it may go, but no further: and hence we are called, not to fear the fury of the oppressor. Yea, the devil himself, who bears the pompous and magnificent title of god of this world, lies bound in a chain strongly twisted by Jehovah's hand, so that it cannot be broken: nor can he do any thing but as the chain is lengthened out. But Jehovah himself is not only powerful: he is the Omnipotent: he can do everything that is consistent with his perfections. "He formeth the mountains, and createth the wind. He declareth unto man

what is his thought, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth. The Lord of Hosts is his name." It is he "who created the heavens and the earth, and upholds them by the word of his power." It is he who, by a deluge of water, swept away the old ungodly world. It is he who rained fire and brimstone upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whereby they were turned into ashes, and were made an example unto those who afterwards should live ungodly. It is he who parted the waters of the Red Sea for a passage to his people, while he caused them to meet upon Pharaoh, and his chariots, and his horse-men, so that "they sank like lead in the mighty waters." It is he who caused the earth to open and swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, so that all that were round about fled at the cry of them; for they said, "lest the earth swallow us up also." It is he who sent forth his angel, and smote in Sennacherib's army an hundred and fourscore and five thousand men, in one night. These are instances of the mighty power of God, in a way of judgment: and there are not wanting as eminent instances of his power, in a way of mercy. And, after such an account of the power of the Most High, wilt thou, O man, lift up thine hand against him. Thou art, in his hand, less by far than the moth in thine own. He can bruise us, he can speak, yea, he can look us into nothing.

3dly, Consider the infinite wisdom of God, as it is displayed in the whole economy of providence. Job ix. 4, "He is wise in heart." Praise and glory are ascribed unto him, under the title of God only wise, Rom. xvi. 27. Men of power often want wisdom to direct them in the execution of their power, for great men are not always wise, and so their power degenerates into tyranny and oppression, and often ends in the ruin both of the ruler and the ruled. But the Generalissimo of the world, the great Pilot of the universe, is God only and infinitely wise. All his measures are laid with such depth of wisdom, that nothing can disconcert them. He sees into all possible futurities, so that no event can surprise him. However the sons of men may be

alarmed, his holy and wise hand is always at the upper end of the chain, and he knows and moves every link of it. He sets all the wheels in motion, from the least to the greatest, and they move no way without his direction. There cannot so much as a hair fall to the ground, without his will. This we think a very trivial thing, and yet there is a divine hand in it. The bullets fly promiscuously in the day of battle, yet they are so under the direction of God, that they fall only on those whom he has a mind to kill, and pass by those whom he intends to save alive.

A beautiful line of wisdom runs through the whole scene of providence, which challenges an entire and absolute resignation. The world has now lasted nearly six thousand years; and, during that vast period, there have been strange convulsions and commotions in it. But we may challenge both men and devils, to name but one event of providence, from the creation of the world to this very day, that can in the least impeach the wisdom of its Governor. Your most accomplished statesmen and politicians have been guilty of great imprudencies; they have committed most notorious blunders in their public conduct. But our God has not only the management of this and the other petty kingdom, but he also presides over this whole world, and likewise over the other world, that world of spirits; yet never was there, is there, or shall there be, one piece of maladministration in all his dominions; therefore be you absolutely resigned to the conduct of this wise God, who "is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

4thly, Consider the justice and equity of him who rules in Jacob, and unto the ends of the earth. Moses, the man of God, after he had seen many strange scenes of providence, gives ample testimony to this, Deut. xxxii. 4, "He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity: just and right is he." He does all things in number, weight and measure. He acts according to the eternal rule of righteousness. True, indeed, his own people bear the burden

and heat of the day, while his enemies lie at ease: the former are often sore afflicted, while the latter have things prospering to their wish. But, my brethren, think honourably of God, notwithstanding this seemingly unequal distribution. Love and hatred are not known by any of these things. Neither poverty nor riches, are badges of Heaven's special favour. The best and the worst of men have been in either state. And if this will not satisfy the unsubdued murmuring sinners, if they will still reflect upon the Governor of the world, as if his ways were unequal, let them know, that there is a day coming, when God will convince them of the hard speeches, which they have spoken against him. Then we shall have a clear commentary upon this obscure text, the providence of God, when the great reasons of state shall be declared, why this nation or kingdom was overthrown, while another, that was as wicked, continued to flourish. Why so many good men were oppressed and borne down, while some of the worst of men had more than their heart could wish. Then the mystery of providence will be clearly unfolded, to the great joy of the resigned, and to the conviction and terrible consternation of the murmurers, who shall go speechless to the pit.

5thly, Consider the faithfulness and mercy of God, that so you may be absolutely resigned unto his disposal. Moses, in that forecited place, celebrates the truth and faithfulness of God, as well as his justice: and Joshua, the successor of Moses, who likewise beheld many strange scenes of providence, gives testimony to the same truth, when he had a near view of death. He appeals unto the consciences of the people, if any "one thing had failed of all the good things which the Lord their God spake concerning them," Josh. xxiii. 14. We are greatly surprised with some dispensations of providence, which now and then fall out in the world: but every one of them is the accomplishment of the divine purpose, which should silence you: and some of them are the accomplishment of the divine mercy, which should make you rejoice. He is good, and kind, and mer-

ciful, who then would not be resigned to his disposal. You never saw, read or heard of any dispensation of providence, so strangely checkered with judgment, that there were no vestiges of the divine goodness in it.

But to move you further to this absolute resignation unto the divine disposal, consider some other things: As,

1st, That resignation is one of those things which God values very highly, as the apostle Peter declares, 1 Pet. iii. 4. Satan and the world call this meekness meanness, and this quietness under the Lord's hand, dulness and stupidity; for they have names of reproach to all the graces of the spirit and to the duties of Christianity: but the judgment of God is always according to truth; and it is in favour of the meek, humble, and resigned souls. Though they are among the despised things of the world, though they be counted as the filth and offscouring of all things, like the apostles of old, yet God never thinks the less of them, but still honours, esteems, and loves them. As an evidence of this, observe what he says, Isa. lxvi. 1, 2, "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you build unto me; and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." He challenges the Jews here, to find him a place to dwell in; but presently he finds out one for himself, and one that they would never have dreamed of, so long as they had a pompous and magnificent temple for him; and that was the heart of a poor and contrite man, that trembled at his word. They would despise such a dwelling; but observe how highly Jehovah speaks of it. "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; for all those things hath mine hand made." But I have a piece of workmanship that I value more than them all, and that is, a poor and contrite spirit; a humble, self-denied, resigned soul: and I will enter into that soul as my habitation, and I will dwell in it, when your temple shall be no more; yea,

when the heavens and the earth shall be no more: for I will dwell in it for ever.

2dly, Consider the many precious promises made to meek and resigned souls, which you can never claim the benefit of, so long as you behave like "bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke." It is promised to the meek, that they shall eat, and shall be satisfied, Psal. xxii. 26. Though they may have but a little, yet of that little they shall eat and be satisfied, while the wicked, in their fulness, shall be in straits. While others cry incessantly, "Who will show us any good?" and, like birds of prey, catch at everything they like, right or wrong, when they have got all, they will still be dissatisfied: whereas the resigned soul, that receives the smallest portion from God's hand with thankfulness, will find such satisfaction in it, as will make him far more happy, than if he had all the revenues of the wicked. See also, Psal. xxv. 9, "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." These are two great and precious promises. If your spirits are absolutely resigned unto the divine disposal, God will guide you in judgment; that is, he will guide you in your practical judgment of things; he will teach you to distinguish between good and evil, sin and duty. In all circumstances he will direct your steps, so that you shall not turn aside. Now, my brethren, this is a great benefit to those that are living in an ensnaring world, and who have enemies within them, ready to lead them aside. If you will but shut your eyes, and give your hand to the Lord, he will lead you safely through all dangers. Moreover, as he will teach you your way, so he will teach you his way; his way of grace, and his way of providence: that is a deep and mysterious way, and yet most perfect, though the world fret and stumble at it. He will show you, how the strangest ways of his providence are consistent with the eternal rule of righteousness, and with the promise, which secures a happy issue of all trials to them that love him. That is likewise a precious promise made to the meek, Isa. xxix. 19, "The meek also shall increase their joy in the

Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the holy One of Israel." Observe, it is not said, the meek shall have joy, but that they "shall increase their joy;" intimating, that in the midst of their afflictions, and when there is as yet no prospect of deliverance, they have joy; but when the deliverance cometh, they increase their joy. If you would have God to strengthen your heart, you must be of good courage. If you would have him to increase your joy, you must not faint or repine, but be resigned in tribulation. Another promise made to the meek, you have, Psal. cxlix. 4, "For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation." There is a twofold salvation he will beautify them with. 1st, A temporal salvation, by delivering them from their troubles and distresses; so that, "though they have lien among the pots, yet they shall be as doves, whose wings are covered with silver, and feathers with yellow gold." 2dly, With an eternal salvation. He will beautify them "with the fine linen of the saints; with the robe of Christ's righteousness; so that they shall shine forth as the sun;" yea, they shall outshine all the angels of heaven. They, in all their glory, are not arrayed like one of the saints. Let not the people of God, therefore, be discouraged, though they have lien among the pots; for the Lord will be "the lifter up of their head." He will "give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." It is said of him, that "he lifteth up the meek, while he casteth the wicked to the ground." Men tread upon the shrubs and branches that lie among their feet; but those who humble themselves under God's hand, and cast themselves down at his feet, he does not tread upon, but lifts them up and sets them on high; whereas he takes pleasure in mortifying the proud, and casting them down to the ground. The last promise I shall mention, made to meek and resigned souls, is their "inheriting the earth:" and this is made both in the Old and New Testament, Psal. xxxvii. 11. Matt. v. 5. However small their portion of

this earth may be, yet there shall be new heavens, and a new earth, of which the fretters and murmurers shall not enjoy one foot breadth; but, being turned out of this cursed earth which they possessed before, they shall be thrown down to the pit, where they shall murmur through eternity: whereas the meek shall inhabit the new earth, without molestation from any hand.

3dly, Consider the threatenings denounced against such as fret and murmur, under the hand of the Lord. The Lord, by the prophet, denounces a woe against him that striveth with his Maker, Isa. xlv. 9. And it is several thousand years, since he threatened to come forth with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon murmurers and complainers. It seems the day of judgment is appointed with a peculiar view unto them, among others, Jude ver. 15, 16. Think with yourselves, my brethren, what terror, confusion and shame, will seize upon the murmurers at that day, when they shall see him with their eyes against whom they murmured, and when they shall hear him with their ears, accounting for, and justifying all those dispensations of his providence, which they fretted at as hard and unreasonable; when they shall hear him, convincing them of their ungodly thoughts and ungodly speeches, which they uttered against him and his ways, so effectually, that they shall have nothing to reply in their own defence. How will they be nonplussed? How will they be filled with shame and confusion, and cry to the rocks and mountains to fall on them? Therefore, since there is a day coming, when God will clearly account for his administration, take heed to your spirits: judge nothing before the time: pass no rash censures upon him and his ways now, lest you be put to open shame at that day, "when he will come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe."

4thly, An unresigned temper of spirit, as it is dishonouring to God, so it is extremely hurtful unto yourselves. A murmurer against God is his own tormentor: he is the worst kind of cannibal, for he eats his own flesh: he keeps

himself in a perpetual ferment, and pines away by his own ill-natured and rebellious spirit: Job v. 2, "Envy slayeth the silly one." And Solomon calls it the "rotteness of the bones," Prov. xiv. 30. The misery of the murmurer is, that he can be satisfied with nothing that he has, because of something that he wants. God's taking or withholding something from him that his heart lusteth after, makes him like Amnon, to be lean from day to day, and to despise all the other good things that he enjoys. Thus Ahab fell sick amidst all the riches, honours and pleasures of a kingdom, because of Naboth's vineyard. And Haman, notwithstanding his riches and preferment at court, cried out, "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate," Esth. v. 13. And Rachel was so impatient for children, that nothing could make her relish life without them: "Give me children," says she, "else I die." Thus, murmuring under one cross, makes people overlook and undervalue many mercies: yea, it makes them not enjoy, but suffer life.

5thly, Absolute resignation to the divine will keeps a person sweet and easy in all circumstances. He that can just lay himself and all his concerns down at the Lord's feet, with humble confidence that all shall be well, has a serenity of mind much to be desired. That man is fit for all circumstances. Be he poor or rich, high or low, living or dying, he is perfectly easy; and can say with the prophet Habakkuk, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." At present, you live in a world full of uncertainties. If it is well with you to-day, it may be ill with you to-morrow. You know not what variety may be in your lot. But if you are possessed of the resigned temper, you will find yourselves easy in every change.

6thly, Resignation is the way to get good of all your afflictions. It will turn all your crosses into mercies.

They who are so impatient, that they must have the plaster presently removed, need not be surprised that the sore is not whole. And those who will not lie still till the Lord hew and polish them, shall never be pillars in the heavenly Jerusalem, but shall be thrown down as rubbish into the pit. They who will not endure the Lord's furnace of affliction, shall be consumed as dross and stubble by the fire of his wrath, while those who patiently endure the trial, shall at last be brought out of the furnace shining and pure as gold, Job xxiii. 10. Know, then, that the end of your afflictions is your sanctification. And if ever you would attain that blessed end, be resigned: wait the Lord's time. If he casts you down, lie still till his own hand lift you up; and then you shall stand and never fall.

7thly, Consider that your murmuring cannot stop the purposes of God, or change the course of his providence: for he is of one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doth. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever:" and this is a part of it, that, through many tribulations the righteous must enter into the kingdom of God. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." There is no peradventure here: it is positively asserted. Now, shall the stated method of providence be altered, to gratify every peevish complainer? Must the purposes of the only wise God be broken for our ease, and to please our humour?

To conclude. Christ was resigned. And shall the Christian rebel, and so blaspheme the worthy name by which he is called? Nay, but on the contrary, let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, with respect to his Father's will.

SERMON VIII.

LOVE TO GOD ILLUSTRATED AND ENFORCED.

MARK xii. 30.—“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment.”

THESE words are our Lord's answer to the question proposed by the Scribe, ver. 28, “Which is the first commandment of all?” or, as Matthew has it, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” Matt. xxii. 35. These Scribes were of two sorts, either civil, such as our public notaries, or ecclesiastic, being paraphrasers and expounders of the law. This man was of the Pharisees; and among them was the question concerted which he proposed to our Saviour. “When the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together; then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him.” The Pharisees and Sadducees were extremely opposite to one another; but they both agreed in their opposition to Christ. The cunning and policy of the Pharisees is observable here, in that, though the question was concerted among them, yet but one of them proposes it: if he prevailed, they would all triumph, because he was of their sect; but if he were foiled, as the Sadducees had been lately, they would put it off, and say it was but his own private concert. Some think that this lawyer was one of them that had applauded Christ, for his conquest over the Sadducees in the last conflict, and that for a penance, he was enjoined by his fellow Pharisees to undertake the following dispute with Christ. This they

ground upon what is said in the 28th verse before our text, "and perceiving that he had answered them well." But however that be, our Lord's answer to the question is full, clear, and plain, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." In which words, observe, 1st, A duty enjoined, and that is love, which is the opening or letting out of the heart after some good proportionable to itself. If we consider love, as a habit implanted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, then it is a grace, and the queen among the graces, as faith is the king. Consider it as acted and put forth by us upon its object, and then it is a duty, and such an one as greatly influences all other duties. Love is a cardinal affection; it is, as it were, the master bee, which carries all the swarm with it. 2dly, Observe the object of this love, viz. God in Christ; for otherwise he cannot be our God: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." God out of Christ is a consuming fire, a dread and terror to the guilty; but God in Christ is inviting, amiable, yea, altogether lovely. Hence it is observable, that the covenant of grace is the frontispiece to the moral law. When God came down upon the mount, to speak all the words of the law, the very first word he spoke was a word of grace; yea, it was the very covenant of grace; "I am the Lord thy God," Exod. xx. 2 Is the Lord our God any other way than by the covenant of grace; yea, is not this the express tenor of the covenant of grace, "I will be your God?" 3dly, The manner of this love is likewise enjoined. If we would know how we are to love the Lord, we are to love him with all our heart, and with all our soul. There are two things here, 1st, The extension of parts, the heart and soul, mind and strength. Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, for he hath created it; with all thy soul, for he hath redeemed it; with all thy strength, for he hath preserved it; with all thy mind, for he hath enlightened it. The heart is here put for the will, the soul for the affections, and the mind for the understanding. 2dly, The extension of degrees. Our understanding must think of God; our wills must cleave to him; our love, fear,

confidence and delight must be carried out to him, without division or deviation to other things. *Lastly*, We have a powerful motive to the practice of this duty, the loving of God, because it is the first and great commandment: so that while we neglect this, we do just nothing at all. Neither are we to think that the love of God is made the first and great commandment, only by the New Testament dispensation; for Moses says the same thing to the Jews, Deut. vi. 4, 5. that Christ here says to the Scribe.

In discoursing further from these words, I would, *First*, Explain the nature of the duty here enjoined, loving God.

In describing or giving an account of what is commonly called the love of God, there are two extremes which some men have run into, both which ought to be avoided, namely, enthusiasm upon the one hand, and cold philosophy upon the other. Some describe our love to God in such a mystical enthusiastic manner, as makes it both unintelligible and impracticable to mortals: of these there have been instances in the Romish church; and there may be some such among ourselves.

On the other hand, some have been so much prejudiced at these enthusiastic heats and fervours, that they have run into the quite contrary extreme, describing the love of God in a manner abundantly real, but quite cold and uninteresting. They have philosophised it so much, as to take it out of the affections, and place it entirely in the understanding, while, at the same time, it is unintelligible to the bulk of mankind, who have neither capacity nor opportunity to understand long chains of reasonings, and so can never in that way be brought to the love of God.

The scripture account of the matter is perfectly plain, and adapted to the meanest capacity. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. And I shall, through grace, endeavour to imitate the plainness and simplicity of the scriptures, in what I have to say upon the subject.

To proceed, then, I conceive there is a sixfold love which we owe to God, as our God in Christ. And,

1st, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of benevolence. This is the lowest degree of love, and therefore I begin with it, that we may ascend from it to higher degrees. This is a love we owe to mankind at large, yea, to our enemies; them we are bound to wish well to. How much more do we owe it unto our God, who performeth all things for us, and is our best friend? All those places of scripture, which express the saints' sorrow for the dishonour done to God, as also their desires, wishes and prayers for the manifestation of God's glory, and for the flourishing of his interest in the world, are instances of this love of benevolence, whereof we speak. We have many examples hereof in the book of Psalms, where the inside of that man is turned out to the view of the church, who was said to be, according to God's own heart. Did not that man wish well to God and his interest in the world, who says, "I beheld transgressors and was grieved. Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered, let them that hate him flee before him. Blessed be his glorious name for ever. Let the whole earth be filled with his glory, Amen, and Amen. O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness." The saints could wish for a voice that would reach many thousands; and if they had one audible to all the world, they would use it no otherwise than to be precentors of the praises of God, to call up and begin the song, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness." The last verse of the book of Psalms expresses the warmest love to the honour and interest of God; "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

2dly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of the highest estimation. One may be the object of love, for whom we can have no great esteem. The love of compassion is often called for, where esteem, value, or honour can have no place; but when God is the object, the highest esteem is due from angels and men, and is still too little, because his excellencies and perfections are infinite: for "who can by searching find out God? who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?"

We have the saints, up and down the scriptures, expressing their high esteem of their God. Moses, in his swan-like song, Deut. xxxii. 31, says, "For their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges." The Israelites were very ready to turn aside to the gods of the nations, yet the worshippers of these very gods were ready to acknowledge, that they were no way comparable to the God of Israel. The same man, by way of conclusion to his blessing of the tribes, cries out in a holy transport of admiration, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun," Deut. xxxiii. 26. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity," says the prophet, Mic. vii. 18. To the same purpose speaks the apostle, Phil. iii. 8, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus," and do count them but dung or dog's meat, "that I may win Christ." It is recorded to the honour of Moses, in the New Testament, that he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt," Heb. ii. 26. A sincere lover of God would not lay all the kingdoms of the world in the balance with him: such an one would rather embrace Christ with his cross, than sin with a crown. Their money perish with them, (said the famous Italian convert) who think all the gold of the Indies to be compared, with one hour's communion with the blessed Jesus.

If then we would know whether we truly love the Lord, let us consider how we rate and value things, when they come in comparison or in competition with God: for many pretend to this love, who discover the naughtiness of their pretensions, when such things are taken from them, as they esteemed above God. Give them God and the world together, and they will make a shift betwixt the two; but take worldly comforts from them, and they can make nothing of God at all. Why? Because they never esteemed him as the most excellent object; they never counted him as the portion of their souls. In their hearts, which is the book of valuation, God is not above all, but he is beneath

all; he is behind all; he is at the foot of their account; he is not the *imprimis*, but an *item*.

3dly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of desire, Psal. lxxiii. 25, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides thee." Psal. lxiii. 1. A Psalm penned by David when he was in the wilderness of Judah, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Strong and pathetic expressions, which we cannot understand aright, without entering into the spirit of him that uttered them. The warmest addresses that ever were made to heaven by the saints, have come from wildernesses, prisons, dungeons, and places of distress; for the Lord grants an enlargement of spirit, as ballast for the confinement and distress of the outward man.

This love of desire carries three things in it. 1st, A desire of communion and fellowship with God, above all things. "O when wilt thou come unto me? when shall I come and appear before God?" says the Psalmist. The apostle John speaks of this communion, in a way of holy boasting and glorification, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," 1 John i. 3. Let a soul be brought into the chamber of presence, and admitted unto holy familiarity with God through Christ, and that soul will care but little how the world goes, because it lives above the world. 2dly, A desire after all those ordinances and means which God has appointed for maintaining communion and fellowship with him, as the word, sacraments, and prayer. In the time of Absalom's rebellion David was an exile; but his banishment from the royal palace did not half so much grieve him as his banishment from the sanctuary, Psal. lxxxiv. 1, 2. He seems to envy the birds that built their nests near to the altar, ver. 3, "The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars."

Saints and hypocrites both attend ordinances and do duties, but with this remarkable difference, that the former

seek God in the duty, and are not satisfied except they find him therein; the latter attend the ordinances, do the duty, and then they think they have done all; but they never enquire after God, or desire communion with him. The saint, through the duty as a means, gets to rest in God; the hypocrite rests externally in the duty, without enquiring after God. 3dly, Distress and uneasiness under the want of communion with God. Job is a lively example of this; "Behold," says he, "I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot find him. O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat." The soul, under the hidings of God's face, says with the church in Lamentations, "Mine eye trickleth down," &c. Lament. iii. 49, 50.

4thly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of delight, Psal. xxxvii. 4, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Hab. iii. 17, 18, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." When this love of delight takes place, nothing can satisfy the soul, but God himself. The presence of an angel could not satisfy Moses, when the Lord refused to go up with the people. At the hearing of the tidings, the people went into mourning, and no man put on him his ornaments, Exod. xxxiii. 4. And Moses protests against the journey, unless he had God along with him, ver. 15. Hypocrites howl to God upon their beds, as the prophet speaks, but let God cast a bone to them, that is to say, give them some earthly comfort, and that satisfies them: whereas, if God should give heaven itself to the saints, and hide himself from them, they could not be happy. If God should take them up to the magnificent mansions of glory, and say, now enjoy yourselves here, and no evil shall ever come near you, but you shall not see my face, I will go into a retiring room and tarry there. My brethren, I be-

lieve, upon such an intimation from God, all the saints would hang up their harps, and the heavenly mansions would sound with groans and lamentations instead of hallelujahs.

Moreover, the soul that delights in God, delights in all that is God's. Hence there is a delighting in the Son of God; "We rejoice in Christ Jesus;" a delighting in the word; "I rejoice at thy Word—thy statutes are my song;" a delighting in the people of God; "the excellent ones—in whom is all my delight."

5thly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of friendship. God in Christ is the believer's friend, Song v. 16, "This is my friend:" it is spoken in a way of holy boasting and glorification: and the believer is the friend of God, as Abraham is called, James ii. 23. which is a far more honourable title than that of king, emperor, or monarch. The whole intercourse betwixt God and his people is just a league of friendship, made and maintained by Jesus Christ. Now the love of true friendship is very strong and fervent: for as the scripture saith, "A man's friend is as his own soul," Deut. xiii. 6. And if we love the Lord with this love of friendship,

(1.) Our friendship with the world will be broken up, because it is declared enmity against God, James iv. 4. Not that we are to hate men's persons, or harbour malice in our breasts against any; for this is a temper diametrically opposite to the gospel; but we must hate all the corrupt maxims, customs, practices and examples of the world, as also its vain allurements and entanglements. We must look off all these things to the author and finisher of our faith.

(2.) We will earnestly desire communion and fellowship with God. Intimate friends, you know, are fond of one another's company; and when they are in different places, they will correspond by letters. God, in respect of the immensity of his nature, is everywhere; but as heaven is the place where he fully manifests his glory to his saints, they reckon themselves absent from him, while they are in

the body upon the earth, 2 Cor. v. 6. but in the use of the ordinances and means of grace, they keep up a correspondence with their friend within the veil: their hearts are in heaven; their desires and delight are there; their hope is there; their thoughts and meditations are there; and thither do they send their prayers in the name of Christ.

(3.) We will be tenderly affected with the dishonours done to his name in the world. No man can bear to see his intimate friend abused. Love beareth all things, yet there are two things it cannot bear; the displeasure of God, and the dishonour of God. "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes; because they keep not thy law," Psal. cxix. 136. This (says one) is more than Adam did in his innocency. Had he been affected with Eve's disobedience, he would not have followed her example, but have said to her, as Joseph to his mistress, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" or, as the Lord said to Moses, "Let it suffice thee; speak no more."

(4.) We will often speak of him, and commend him unto others; "Come and hear all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul." When they ask the spouse, Cant. v. 9, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" She launches forth into a particular description of him, and concludes with this, that "he is altogether lovely." Grace, like the author of it, is communicative of itself; and would share its blessed effects among many others. No person partakes of the grace of God in truth, but would wish all others partakers of the same, Acts xxvi. 29.

6thly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of acquiescence. As the Lord rests in his love towards his people, so they must rest in their love to him. From the moment the soul centres upon a God in Christ by faith and love, it enters into rest, and may sing a *requiem* to itself, as in Psal. cxvi. 7, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." Now, whence had David's soul this rest? how came he by it? why, he set his heart and soul upon God, and so he could

not miss it: for, in the first verse of that Psalm he says, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications:" and then it follows in the seventh verse, "Return unto thy rest." As if he had said, I have long been seeking rest and could not find it; but I have at last fixed my heart and hope upon a God in Christ, and so I can invite my soul to an undisturbed bed of rest.

I shall, in the next place, lay before you some of the scripture characters and qualifications of the saints' love to God, that it may be the easier distinguished from the specious pretences of hypocrites. And,

1st, Our love to God in Christ must be sincere. Paul concludes his epistle to the Ephesians, by praying, "Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," Ephes. vi. ult. When our Lord put the question thrice to Peter, "Simon, lovest thou me?" no doubt it brought to Peter's remembrance his three-fold denial of him; and a humbling sense hereof makes the good man to insist not upon the degree of his love, but upon the sincerity of it. He does not say, Lord, I love thee more than all the rest; I could go to prison and to death with thee: but he rests in a humble appeal to his Master's omniscience, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee," John xxi. 17.

My brethren, there is not a grace comes from heaven but it has its counterfeit on earth: therefore, though as some divines observe, love can be hardliest counterfeit of any other grace, yet, no doubt, there have been, and still are, a number of false pretenders unto it. People may really love God, and yet not love him sincerely and purely, because their love does not proceed from right motives and principles: they love him not for himself, but for his benefits. The Capernaumites sought Christ very earnestly, yet it was not for himself, but "because they did eat of the loaves and were filled," John vi. 26.

OBJECTION. But may we not love God, because of the benefit we receive from him. *Ans.* No doubt of it. David says, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of

my supplication," Psal. cxvi. 7. But if we love him only for the benefits we receive of him, this is self-love, and not the love of God. God is in himself the most amiable object, as he is possessed of all possible perfections and excellencies, and as such he should be the object of our superlative love and admiration. Intrants into religion may be brought to love God from the consideration of his benefits, but as they advance further therein, and come to more acquaintance with God, they will love him chiefly, though not only, for what he is in himself. In a word, not to love God for his benefits is monstrous ingratitude: to love him only for his benefits is self-love, and argues unacquaintedness with the perfections and excellencies of his nature.

I should not have wished that person to succeed in the attempt, who, in a fit of enthusiasm, is said to have gone through the streets of a city, with water in the one hand to quench hell, and fire in the other to burn up heaven, that man might serve God for himself, and not for hope of reward or fear of punishment. Success, I am afraid, in that attempt, would have burnt up the strongest cords and sinews of religion: for the scripture everywhere addresses our hopes and fears, as the two handles by which our souls are taken hold off and managed: so, what God is in himself, and what he does for us, are two motives to love him, which we must not disjoin or separate, any more than we do faith and good works.

2dly, Our love to God in Christ must be fervent. This is intended in the heaping up of words in the text, "All the heart, all the soul." Cant. viii. 6, 7, "Love is strong as death.—The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." The fervency of the believer's love to God in Christ appears, in that, (1.) They count nothing too much for him. Fervent love stands at no cost or expense upon the object beloved; it can bestow all it has, or can do, upon the Lord. Abraham is willing to offer unto the Lord his son, his only son Isaac, the staff of his old age, the hope of his life, the child of the

promise. David might have had Araunah's threshing floor in a present, to build an altar unto the Lord; but David would needs give fifty shekels of silver for it; for, (says he) "I will not offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which cost me nought," 2 Sam. xxiv. 24. The same fervency of love to his God appeared in his vast contributions for the building of the temple. He prepared a hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver, and of brass and iron without weight. The sum of what David offered is computed to be more than any king in the world is worth; and yet when he had done all, he says, "In my trouble (or poverty) have I done this," 1 Chron. xxii. 14. The primitive Christians, out of love to Christ, sold their lands, and laid the money at the apostles' feet; and the converts at Ephesus burnt their magic books, to the value of fifty thousand pieces of silver. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed," Acts xix. 20. (2.) They count nothing too hard for him, I mean, to suffer for him. "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart; for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus," Acts xxi. 13. But may be this was only a flourish of his colours, when he knew the enemy to be far enough off: he may yet change his thoughts when he comes to look death in the face: nay, what he said he stands to, in 2 Tim. iv. 6, "For I am now ready to be offered." He had already laid his head upon the block, and was dead before the stroke was given, not with fear as some have been, but with a free resignation of himself unto it. The first Christians counted nothing too hard for Christ: yea, they rejoiced and reckoned it an honour to suffer the hardest things for his name's sake. And, my brethren, though we are not now a-days called to such hard conflicts as they were inured unto, yet are we called to have the same affections towards Christ that they had, and to consider all worldly things, even life itself, in the same light that they did, when they come to stand in competition with the honour and interest of Christ.

3dly, Our love to Christ must be active and laborious, as was that of the Hebrews, for which the apostle commends them, Heb. vi. 10, "For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Paul laboured more abundantly than any of the rest of the apostles; he planted more churches, preached more sermons, wrote more epistles, and travelled longer journeys than any of the rest. He had done more in opposition to Christ than any of them in the days of his irregnecacy; but afterwards it appeared, that where sin had abounded, grace did much more abound. It is likely he loved Christ more than any of them; and so laboured more for him than any of them. It is he who denounces that terrible curse against those who loved not our Lord Jesus, 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

If we are lovers of God, we must be active, laborious, and diligent people; we must be always abounding in the work of the Lord; we must be filled with the fruits of righteousness. We must not turn remiss and indolent, or sit down on what we have already attained, but must be growing in grace, and flourishing in all the acts and duties of holiness. There should be an ambitious emulation among Christians, to go before and excel one another, in every good thing.

4thly, Our love to God in Christ must be constant, like the holy fire upon the altar of old, which was kept continually burning. Observe Paul's prayer for the Philipians, you that are lovers of Christ, and put it up for yourselves, that your love may abound yet more and more, Philip. vii. 9. and downwards. Some set off in religion with flying colours and topsails, with a mighty flow of affections towards God and Christ; but, having no root in themselves, they endure but for a while: their love cools by degrees, till they fall from it altogether, and so become seven times more the children of the devil, than they were before. The love of the world, the love of carnal lusts and pleasures, carries them off from their first love, and they turn apostates.

5thly, Our love to God must be superlative ; that is to say, we must love him above all persons and things whatsoever, Psal. lxxiii. 25, 26. The hypocrite has a double heart, as the expression is in Psalm xii. 2. or rather as it is in the original, "an heart and a heart," that is to say, two hearts, one for God, and another for the creature, or for any thing else. But the Lord claims the whole heart ; "my son, give me thy heart ;" and he will either have it all, or none of it at all. A heart divided betwixt God and the creature, is such an heart that the love of God cannot dwell therein. As she was not the true mother of the child, who was for dividing it, so neither are those true lovers of God, who divide the heart betwixt God and Mammon.

Mind what Christ says, Luke xiv. 26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Not that we are to hate any person, far less our nearest friends ; but the meaning is, that when the enjoyment of these comes in competition with the honour and interest of Jesus Christ, we must freely give up with them. Holy Jerome understood this text well, when he said, "If my father should stand before me, my mother should hang upon me, my brethren should press about me, I would break through my brethren, throw down my father, tread under foot my mother, to cleave to Jesus Christ."

Having opened up the nature of the love of God, and assigned the scripture characters and qualifications thereof, I proceed, in the third place, to offer some reasons for it, and these shall be two.

1st, He best deserves our love. We are ready to bestow our love upon very undeserving objects ; and often when the object is deserving, we nevertheless bestow more love upon it than it does deserve. Our passions generally run out either upon unlawful objects, or in immoderate degrees on lawful ones. But if God in Christ be the object of our love, it is impossible we can exceed in the degree of it : for he is the most deserving object.

(1.) In respect of what he is in himself. But alas, what a lame and imperfect account is it that we can give of God; for "Who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Simonides being asked by Hiero king of Sicily, what God was, desired a day to think of it, which being elapsed, he desired a second, and then a third; and at last told the king, that the more he thought of the question, the more he was diffculted how to answer it. And indeed, it is not to be wondered at, that a man who knew not the scriptures could give but little account of God; for though his glory shines brightly in the sun, and sparkles in every star, yet the blind cannot see it, which is the case of all natural men. Nor are the heathen sages excepted here; for the apostle, speaking of them, says, Rom. i. 22, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

God is the greatest and the best of beings. Goodness and greatness meet in him, and are sweetly tempered together. He is self-sufficient, and all-sufficient; all perfections and all excellencies centre in him; and whatsoever of excellence is to be found about any creature, it is derived from him as the fountain. Here then, O Christian, is the proper object of love, a God in Christ. Who is like unto him; who in heaven or in earth may once be compared with him? "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun," Deut. xxxiii. 26.

(2.) In respect of what he is and does unto us. Have we not reason to say with the Psalmist, Psal. ciii. 1—4, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies."

He is our Creator, the Father of our spirits, and the Former of our bodies. He is called "the God of the spirits of all flesh," Numbers xxvii. 16. A most condescending expression; that he, who hath innumerable myriads of

spirits inhabiting the spacious realms of light, should not disown, but acknowledge a relation to spirits so meanly embodied, as ours are, in frail and mortal flesh. And David praises him for the curious formation of the body, Psal. cxxxix. 14. and downwards. It is natural for us to love our parents according to the flesh; and shall we not love the great Parent of the universe, in whom we live, move, and breathe, and from whom we have our beings? He called us forth into being, when we might never have been seen or heard of, without any diminution of his glory; and he has admitted us into the class of rational intelligent creatures, capable of enjoying himself, and surely this calls for our love and gratitude.

He is our preserver, Acts xvii. 28. Psal. xxxvi. 6. If he should withdraw his supporting arm from us, we could not subsist one moment. He preserves us in our going out and coming in: he preserves us from morning to evening, and from evening to morning again. He preserves us amidst a multitude of dangers that surround us, and holds our life in his hand, as we hold a candle in a hollow lanthorn, in a dark windy night, that is ready every moment to be blown out. We do not know how many times in a day, the sharp scythe of death is within an inch of the tender thread of life, yet it is not snapt in two, because he preserves it, holding it in his hand. Whom shall we love, if we love not the God of our life, and the length of our days, whose mercies are new to us every morning?

He is our Redeemer; and this is the strongest obligation of all, to love him above all. The apostle John celebrates redeeming love as matchless, saying, "Herein is love, not that we loved God; but that he first loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins," 1 John iv. 10. What, is there love in no other instance but this? There is love in many other instances besides this: he gave us our being among rational creatures; herein is love: he preserves us in being; herein is love: he feeds us, clothes us, and gives us sleep; herein is love. But all these instances of his love, and many more than these, when com-

pared with his giving his Son to the death for us, are but as so many twinkling tapers set up before the sun in his meridian splendour: and therefore the inspired apostle, utterly overwhelmed with this instance of his love, cries out, as if there were none other, "Herein is love," love without precedent, love without parallel. This instance of love stands single and unexampled in all the annals of time, and will stand so through eternity.

Here then is a threefold cord to bind us unto the altar, creation, preservation, and redemption. Reason, justice, equity, interest, gratitude, plead and demand the chief room in our affections to God in Christ. And reflecting on these things, we should say with the martyr, "None but Christ, none but Christ." But,

2dly, He demands our love. Prov. xxiii. 26, "My son, give me thine heart." God says of the heart, as Joseph did to his brethren concerning Benjamin, "Ye shall not see my face without it." Nor is this a counsel or advice which we may take or refuse, as we think proper; but it is a peremptory command which we must obey, under the pain of God's eternal displeasure. "My son, give me thine heart." The son may make entreaties to his father, but it is the privilege of a father to lay commands upon his son. Yet the phrase, my son, imports love as well as authority: and how inexcusable shall we be, if we refuse to obey God's commands, which are so much for our advantage?

Nay, not only is the love of God commanded, but if we will take Christ's testimony, it is the first and great commandment of the law, Matt. xxii. 38. It is first in dignity, because it commands us things concerning God. It is the first in the order of nature, because the love of our neighbour flows from the love of God, as the streams from the fountain, or the effect from the cause. It is the great commandment in respect of its precedence to all the rest. It is great, because the understanding and practice of it is of the greatest importance to us, as it determines our state before God. It is the great commandment, as all the rest are included in it. He who truly loves God, must of

necessity be a conscientious observer of the duties belonging to both tables of the law. It is the great commandment, because it is the end of all the commandments, yea, of the whole revelation which God has made of himself unto mankind; I say, the end and design of it all, is to implant in our hearts a prevailing principle of love to God. Hence the apostle says, 1 Tim. i. 5, "Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of this subject.

From the account you have heard of the love of God, two things may be inferred.

1st, That it does not consist in such enthusiastic heats, raptures and ecstasies as some have boasted of. There may be true and solid love to God in the hearts of those who are strangers to these motions; and they may feel these raptures and transports, whose hearts were never yet melted with a sense of the love of God. The stony ground hearers anon with joy receive the word, Matt. xiii. 20. yet it is a sorry account we have of one of these hearers, in the very next verse; "Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." That true lovers of God have at times transports of joy, is what I nothing doubt; but then I would by no means make these infallible criterions or evidences of the love of God; for then we would condemn numbers of the generation of the righteous, and we would lay soft pillows under the heads of many hypocrites.

2dly, Neither is it consistent with a cold stoical unconcernedness about God and the things of God. Some have been so much prejudiced at pretended raptures and ecstasies in the love of God, that they have turned it out of the affections altogether, and placed it in the understanding, establishing the love of God absolutely upon the principles of reason. The text strikes against this extreme, when it calls us to love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Secondly, Methinks the doctrine of the love of God may be improved for our conviction and humiliation before the Lord. The old complaint may too justly be resumed; "because iniquity does abound, the love of many waxeth cold," Matt. xxiv. 12. Many never had the love of God, and many who once seemed to have had it, are fallen from it. To convince you, how little of the love of God is among us, consider,

1st, The little love and regard that the most have to the ordinances and institutions of the gospel, the word, sacraments, and prayer. How many can let the Bible lie by them from one Sabbath to another, without ever looking on it: public ordinances are a burden to them; they say of the Sabbath, what a weariness is it, and when will it be over, that we may buy and sell and get gain? how many seldom or never bow a knee to God in prayer, which is one great means of keeping up an intercourse with heaven! praying hypocrites there may be; but, sure I am, prayerless saints there cannot be. You may as well suppose a living man without breath, as a lover of God without prayer. It is the very first work of the new creature, as we see in Paul, "Behold he prayeth," Acts ix. 11.

2dly, The prevalence of the love of the world. This is the sin of the professors of the age wherein we live, and there is no convincing them of it: they seem to say of it, as Lot said to Zoar, "Is it not a little one?" people, with all freedom, set heart and soul upon the world, and pursue the business of it, as if it were their chief end. Well, where the love of the world is in a person, or in a place, there the love of God is not; for "we cannot serve God and mammon; and if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John ii. 15.

3dly, The selfishness of the most part, and the little regard had to their neighbour's welfare, speaks them strangers to the love of God. We seem to be fallen into the last times, times of great apostasy, in which men shall be lovers of themselves, making themselves as it were the centre, and all things else the circumference.

Our times are exactly such as the prophet describes, Jer. ix. 4, 5, "Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth:" and in the 8th verse, "One speaketh peaceably to his neighbour, but in heart he layeth wait." Where I do not see the effect, I cannot acknowledge the cause. The love of our neighbour, is the certain effect of the love of God; and therefore, where that effect is wanting, I must say, the love of God is not in that place, nor among that people.

4thly, The general hatred and contempt that tender serious Christians meet with, speaks how little of the love of God is among us: "for he that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten." He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. One of a tender conscience, who scruples at any thing which is sinful, is like a speckled bird in the world, and is the object of its malice, scorn, and reproach. Such an one is called a hypocrite, a precise affected person, unfit for human society. They say the panther has such an antipathy at man, that it will tear the very picture of a man. So wicked men show their hatred and contempt of God, by maltreating of the saints, who are images and representations of him.

Thirdly, This doctrine may be improved by way of trial and examination. If Jesus Christ should put the question to us, that of old he put to Peter, "Simon, lovest thou me?" some, who never felt this love in their hearts, would be bold to answer in the affirmative, and would seem to take it amiss, that their love should be called in question. What, would they say, not love God! God forbid we should not love him: and yet the scripture marks of the love of God are not to be discerned about them: yea, the tract and tenor of their life is like a banner displayed against God and his Christ. But others there are, who, notwithstanding that they truly love God, are so doubtful and diffident of themselves, that they would not know

what to answer. Now to cut off the false pretences of hypocrites, and to satisfy real Christians, perplexed with doubts and fears in this point, I shall, from the scripture, lay down some marks of the love of God, by which we may try and examine ourselves.

1st, The first mark of the love of God shall be hatred of sin in all its kinds, degrees, and appearances, Psal. xcvii. 10, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." Rom. xii. 9, "Let love be without dissimulation." What is the proper evidence thereof? it follows, "abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good." Say then, you who pretend to the love of God, how stand you affected to God's utter enemy, sin? whether is sin the desire and delight of your souls, or is it the grief and burden of your souls? They who truly love God hate sin above all things; and chiefly, because it is contrary to the holy nature and will of God: nor is it some one or more sins that they hate; but, as David says, they hate and abhor every false way: for if we reserve but one sin, and let that be but a little one comparatively, yet it will make such a leak in the ship of the soul, as will infallibly sink it, if it is not stopped. Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel, yet one remained, and therefore Samuel says to him, "are here all thy children?" 1 Sam. xvi. 2. So if you pretend to love God, he says to you, are here all your lusts? is there any thing hid with you in your tent? is there any sweet morsel which you will roll under your tongue? if there be the least reserve, your heart is not mine. Paul was a great lover of Christ, and how he stood affected to sin, let his heavy groan which yet sounds in the ears of the Christian church bear witness; "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Rom. vii. 24.

2dly, Keeping his commandments. Christ himself puts the matter upon this footing, John xiv. 15. And the disciple who lay in his bosom, says, "And this is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments," 1 John v. 3. That is to say, this is the proper evidence, mark and test of the love of God, that we keep his commandments. But alas!

who upon earth perfectly keeps the commandments of God? "There is not a just man upon earth that doth good and sinneth not." How do you explain this mark? *Ans.* Let the tender Christian know that there is a twofold perfection: 1st, A legal perfection, which consists in a sinless conformity to the whole law of God: and thus only the saints and angels in heaven are made perfect. But 2dly, There is an evangelical perfection competent to saints in this life, which consists in an unfeigned respect to all the commandments of God, and a sincere endeavour after universal obedience, Psal. cxix. 6. Say then, how stand you affected to God's holy law: whether do you look on it as an iron chain about your leg, fettering you, or do you esteem it as a golden chain about your neck adorning you?

The hypocrite's report of the law, at least of some part of it, is as in John: but the lovers of God make the same report of his law that Paul does, Rom. vii. 12, "The law is holy, and just, and good." The ten commandments are like a ten-stringed instrument, you must touch on every string, observe every command, otherwise you will never make sweet melody. One says, a good Christian is like a pair of compasses, one foot of the compass stands upon the centre, the other goes round the circle. So a Christian, by faith and love, stands on God the centre, and by obedience, goes round the circle of God's commandments. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me," says Christ, John xiv. 21. Many have the commandments in their heads, in their memories, and in their mouths; but there is not one tittle of them in their hearts, or in their lives. If you have them not in word only, but also in walk and conversation, then are you lovers of God.

3dly, Mortification to the world. 1 John ii. 15, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." God and the world are two such contrary masters, that we cannot serve them both: besides, they are two such capacious objects, that any one of them will take up the heart. If the world has got your heart, it will make it like the inn at Bethlehem; there will be no room for

Christ there: and if Christ has got the heart, then the world must go to the stable and the manger.

In fine, my brethren, the love of God, and the love of the world, are like two buckets in a well, as the one goes up, the other must go down. Meantime, this mark is not to be understood, as if all care and concern about the world were to be laid aside; for this is contrary to other parts of holy scripture, which commands us to be diligent in our particular callings, and to provide things honest: but you must pursue these things, always in a due subordination to the chief end of man. You may possess the things of the world, but let not them possess you. You must keep God in your hearts, and the world in your hands, and but loosely too, that if God take it from you, you may let go your hold, and not have it wrung and torn from you.

4thly, Love to all the saints. 1 John iv. 7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God." 1 John v. 1, "And every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten." People may love souls accidentally, that is to say, from considerations quite extrinsic and foreign to their saintship; but if you love God, you will love saints as such, be they otherwise what they will. You will love them because you discern the image of God in them, though they are not of your opinion in every thing, nor yet of your communion. Though they be poor and despised in the world, weak in their intellect, and peevish in their tempers; I say, notwithstanding these things, you will love them, and associate with them as members of the same mystical body.

5thly, Doing good to others for Christ's sake, especially to the household of faith. 1 John iii. 17, "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" If you love God, you will love mankind for God's sake, as they were made after his image; and you will love the saints for Christ's sake, as they are part of his body. Hence you will be charitably

disposed to those that are in need, and supply them according to your ability, and as you have opportunity; and more especially if they be saints. Christ professeth himself still to be naked, hungry, sick, and in prison, and to stand in need of our visits and supplies. If thou hadst a whole wardrobe of costly apparel, Christ hath more nakedness than all that can cover; if whole barns full of corn, Christ hath more empty bowels that all these can fill. Take heed, then, of an hard unrelenting heart towards them that are in misery, and of a narrow penurious hand; both are inconsistent with the love of God.

OBJECTION. But some will say, I am much under the power of slavish fears, and the scripture says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear," 1 John iv. 18. And this darkens all my evidences. *Ans.* You must distinguish betwixt fear in the love of God, and fear in the lovers of God. The apostle says, "there is no fear in love," but not, that there is no fear in the lovers of God. So I say, there is no unbelief in faith; but if I should say there is no unbelief in believers, they would jointly give me the lie. Again, the apostle says, "Perfect love casteth out fear:" but whose love is perfect in this world? No doubt, the more that any is perfected in love, there will be so much the less of slavish fear: but they may be both together in the same soul. If therefore these fears are your burden, and you desire and endeavour to cast them out, then the love of God is in you of a truth, though not to such a degree as it is in some others. Those fears argue the weakness of love, not the want of it. God made the ant as well as the elephant, the worm as well as the eagle. Cesar's image is upon a silver penny, as well as on the broadest piece of gold: therefore be not too much discouraged.

Fourthly, This doctrine may be improven by way of exhortation, and that in the words of the text. "Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

1st, For motives, consider, It is God who planted the

affection of love in your hearts, therefore hath he a most just title unto your love; and you are guilty of the most horrid ingratitude if you deny it unto him. Who plants a vineyard, and looks not to drink of the wine thereof? God calls our corn and wine his; and much more may he claim our love and joy as his. Should a valuable friend give you notice he was coming to visit you, and send you before hand a vessel of rich wine, would you grudge to broach it for his entertainment when he came? but would it not be monstrous, if with this gift of your valuable friend, you should entertain his declared enemy, and have nothing reserved for him when he came? It is just so here: God your best friend, has implanted the affection of love in you, which is like a rich vessel for his entertainment when he comes; but behold this vessel is broached for Satan and the world, the declared enemies of God: and when God himself comes, you have nothing for him but the stale dregs and sediments which his enemies have left. Be astonished at this, O ye heavens!

2dly, The love of God is the first and great commandment, the end of the law, and the fulfilling of the law; therefore, without it no other duties will be acceptable unto God. The call and commandment from heaven is, "My son, give me thine heart." If you should give all your time to religious duties, all your substance to feed the poor, yea, if you should give your body to be burned, and have not charity, that is to say, the love of God, it will profit you nothing, 1 Cor. xiii. 3. Faith is the king among the graces, and love is the queen that sits at his right hand.

3dly, Love is one of the graces which passes over unto eternity, and shall be exercised there, when faith shall be turned into sight, and hope into enjoyment. Therefore, says the apostle, "Charity never faileth," 1 Cor. xiii. 8. and last verse, "And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Will you not then begin that on earth, which is to be carried on through eternity in heaven?

4thly, If you love God, all things shall work together for your good, Rom. viii. 28. Prosperity or adversity, sickness or health, poverty or riches, death or life, all things shall work together for your good, if you are lovers of God. On the contrary, if you are haters of God, all things shall work for your ruin; your prosperity shall destroy; your table shall be a snare to you; your basket and store shall be cursed; Christ himself shall be a stumbling block to you, and the word of the gospel shall be the savour of death unto death unto your souls.

5thly, Consider the great things which God has prepared for them that love him, 1 Cor. ii. 9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Heaven, with all its joys, is prepared for the lovers of God, even as hell, with all its torments, is prepared for his enemies. The white robes, the palms, and the crown of glory, are prepared for them that love him.

Lastly, Consider what a heavy curse is denounced against those who love him not, 1 Cor. xvi. 22, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." The word "Maranatha" is a compound of two words, which signify, "the Lord cometh:" and so the meaning is, that obstinate enemies of Jesus Christ shall be cursed from henceforth, even unto the coming of the Lord to judge the world at the last day.

I shall now conclude with giving some short directions how to obtain the love of God.

(1.) Be deeply sensible of your enmity against God, and bewail it before him, Rom. viii. 7. (2.) Flee to Jesus Christ by faith for the removal of this enmity, and securing your peace and friendship with God: for he is our peace. (3.) Cry to God earnestly, that he would implant in your hearts, by his holy Spirit, a principle of love to God: "For he that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (4.) Make much use of the word and ordinances; in them the beauty, glory and excellency of Jesus Christ are let

forth into the soul. As kings and princes send their pictures to those whom they espouse; so God has, in his word and ordinances, presented you with an image and representation of himself, that he may engage your hearts thereby. (5.) Meditate much on the love of God and of Christ. (6.) Watch carefully against the prevalence of earthly affections. (7.) Live much in the view of the unseen world, and learn to die daily.

SERMON IX.

THE DUTY OF LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR ILLUSTRATED.

MARK xii. 31.—“And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: there is none other commandment greater than these.”

You have already been instructed in the first and great commandment, which is the love of God. The second is like unto it, and falls now to be considered: “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Our Saviour reduces the ten commandments into two, viz., the love of God, and the love of our neighbour; and Paul reduces them all into one, which is love, Rom. xiii. 10, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” Gal. v. 14, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, which is this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” If any say, how can the law be fulfilled in the love of our neighbour? is not the love of God the first and great commandment? I answer, the love of our neighbour here is not to be taken as separate from the love of God, but as included in it, or flowing from it; even as the effect flows from the cause. God, whom we see not, will be loved in our neighbour whom we see; he will have us manifest our love to him, by loving our neighbour for his sake. In the words we have, 1st, The duty enjoined, which is loving our neighbour. 2dly, The manner of this love, or how we are to love our neighbour, viz. as ourselves. 3dly, The resemblance betwixt this and the first and great commandment; “And the second is like,” &c. What is further necessary

for explaining this division of the text, will cast up as we proceed upon the subject.

In discoursing upon it, I shall, *First*, Endeavour to state the true notion of our neighbour, or whom we are to understand here by neighbour. We learn from our Saviour's sermon on the mount, that the Jewish teachers had greatly corrupted the law, and particularly that they had corrupted the general commandment of the second table touching the love of our neighbour, Matt. v. 43, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy." The passage there referred to, is Lev. xix. 18. But there is not one word commanding or allowing us to hate our enemy; that was the addition of the corrupt Jewish teachers. They corrupted the text two ways, 1. By a misinterpretation of the word neighbour, confiningly restricting it to a friend or a relation. 2. By a false inference from it; that because a man must love his friend, therefore he must hate his enemy. For though our friends and relations, and those who live near to us, are our neighbours, yet in scripture, enemies are called neighbours. Thus the Egyptians are said to be neighbours to the Israelites, yet we all know that they were deadly enemies to them, Exod. xi. 2, "Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman borrow of her neighbour, jewels of silver and jewels of gold." But these neighbours, of whom they borrowed, were the Egyptians. The Samaritan, as our Saviour teaches, was neighbour to the Jew who was in distress and wounded; yet were the Jews and Samaritans enemies to one another. Therefore, by neighbour here, we are to understand mankind at large; and so every man is our neighbour. And as an evidence hereof, it is proper to observe, that the Hebrew word for neighbour in the ninth commandment is the same with that in Lev. xix. 18. Now, neighbour in the ninth commandment is taken for mankind at large, and cannot possibly be taken otherwise, as it can never be lawful for us to bear false witness against any person. And in like manner the ob-

ject of the love enjoined here, is, every person partaking of the same human nature with ourselves. Not but that we may choose our friends among mankind, and love some more than others, but we must love them all, and hate none of them.

Having seen who is our neighbour, I proceed now in the second place, to explain the great duty enjoined towards our neighbour, viz. love. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour." Now, that we may see this duty in its full latitude, I would consider it in a twofold view, First, To love our neighbour, is to do no harm to our neighbour. This is the lowest sense in which we can understand the precept. Secondly, To love our neighbour, is to do him all the kind and good offices we can.

First, To love our neighbour is to do him no harm. And in general, I call that a doing harm to our neighbour, when we do that to him which we would not have him to do to us, according to that notable maxim of our Saviour, Matt. vii. 12. Now the negative part of our duty towards our neighbour comprehends these things.

1st, We must not judge harshly or rashly of our neighbour, Matt. vii. 1. Rom. xiv. 4. James iv. 12. Surely, we would have others judge charitably of us, and are angry with them when they do otherwise: why then should we not do the same unto them? but this matter should be stated clearly, that we may not mistake, and call that rash judging which is sober and just. If I see one do a thing which is manifestly evil, charity does not oblige me to approve either of the deed or the doer: on the contrary, you must not suffer sin to lie upon your brother, but reprove him. Nor is it rash judging to pronounce those who are manifestly living in sin, to be in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity: for this is what ministers of the gospel declare every day. If I see a man living in direct contradiction to the laws of Jesus Christ, it is not rash judging to say, the love of God is not in that man: but it would be very rash judging to call such a one a reprobate, and beyond the reach of the grace of God. This would be a

stepping up to the throne of God, and attempting to open the sealed books of his decrees, and to read out of them the fates of our fellow-men. Rash judging is, for the most part, occasioned by people's different opinions and principles, with respect to religious matters. Hence it prevails among none so much as among professing Christians, though it is a very great scandal to their profession. Many confine their charity entirely to their own sect, and are extremely harsh and cruel in their judging of others, who are in reality better than themselves. They seem to think none are going to heaven, but those who walk in a particular path or lane which they have cut out. My brethren, I wish never to approve of any thing, though in the most eminent sect, that is contrary to the precept or example of Jesus Christ. May my soul never come into the secret of those who thrust the Searcher of hearts out of his office, and take it upon themselves, judging of people's hearts, and pronouncing them hypocrites, or sincere, according as they affect them. The devil is the great pattern of this practice, Job i. 10, 11.

2dly, We must not speak evil of our neighbour: so the apostle James exhorts, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren," James iv. 11. Some have a malicious pleasure in tearing open the sores of their neighbours, and exposing them to shame. They have not an eye to see, nor a heart to acknowledge, anything that is good or commendable about their neighbour; but if there is any blemish, they are eagle-eyed to discern it: if there is any sore that should be gently touched, there they tread, and upon that they feed, like foul creatures upon ulcerous sores.

This is far from being the example of Jesus Christ: for when he saw any thing commendable about any person, he was sure to take notice of it, though otherwise they were but nought. Of the young man that came to him, mark what is said, "Jesus beholding him, loved him," see Mark x. 21.

But is there any harm of speaking evil of our neighbour, if we speak nothing but the truth? *Ans.* What we speak

of our neighbour must be consistent with love as well as with truth. Though we are to speak nothing but the truth, yet all the truth is not to be spoken at all times, or before every person. Though we speak nothing but the truth of our neighbour, yet, if we speak it from malice and ill-will, on purpose to defame and make him odious, we transgress the law of charity. Now, we may reduce evil speakers into, (1.) False accusers. These are mentioned in the black roll, 2 Tim. iii. 3. Under this character are comprehended, not only false libellers and false witnesses at law, who tease and torment innocent people with vexatious processes; but likewise a vile set of people, who, like their father the devil, are the common accusers of the brethren. Ishmael-like, their hand is against every man; rather than want a bad report of a person, they will make one out of their own heads, and lay things to the charge of their neighbours, which they know to be false. Such persons are not afraid to speak evil of dignities, and people in public character, as magistrates, ministers, &c. The malicious heart, and the lying tongue, attack every character, and poison every company and conversation where they get admittance, with something that tends to blast the good name and reputation of some one or other. You may shut your door against a thief, and defend yourself from a murderer; but who can screen himself from a false and lying tongue? (2.) Whisperers. These are mentioned in the black roll, Rom. i. 29. and downwards. These, in the Old Testament, are called talebearers, Lev. xix. 16, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among the people." The word rendered talebearer, signifies a pedlar, which fitly sets forth the character of such persons. The pedlar goes up and down the country offering his wares at every door, and never ceases travelling till he has sold them off: so the talebearer catcheth an evil report of a man at one house, and cannot rest till he is at some other house to tell it again. Now observe how contrary this is to the character of a citizen of Zion, who taketh not up an evil report against his neighbour. He not only will

not make up a false report against his neighbour, but when it is made up to his hand, and laid down at his foot, he will not take it up and send it about as the talebearer does. People of this character raise great commotions in families and in neighbourhoods; and they are the more dangerous, that they do things secretly and under hand, and oftentimes on pretence of friendship. Solomon says, "a whisperer separateth chief friends;" and that "the words of a talebearer are as wounds, and go down to the innermost parts of the belly," Prov. xvi. 28. He that takes away a man's good name, kills him alive, and buries him as it were in the open sepulchre of his own throat.

Moreover, my brethren, as we commonly say, were there no reseters there would be no thieves: so if there were no receivers of evil reports, there would be no rehearsers of them. If you love your neighbour, you will not entertain the malicious whisperer, nor seem pleased at the tale he tells you. David says, "He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house, he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight," Psal. ci. 7.

(3.) Backbiters. These are mentioned along with the whisperers in the black roll, Rom. i. towards the close, and do the same evil to their neighbour's good name, openly, that the whisperers do privately and underhand. At meals and in public companies, they rail at others, either by diminishing and obscuring any thing that is commendable about them, or by aggravating and magnifying, out of all measure, their faults and failings. Thus the head of John the Baptist is oftentimes brought in upon a charger, at the feasts and combinations of malicious backbiters: when they are merry at wine and good cheer, then, to be sure, religious people must be brought into the conversation, as Samson was brought in to the Philistines to make sport to them. The Psalmist complains, that he was made the song of the drunkard.

3dly, We must not defraud, supplant or undermine our neighbour, 1 Thes. iv. 6, "That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter." It is strange to con-

sider how differently things stand rated in the word and in the world. In the world, he is reckoned the best man that sees best to his own affairs, right or wrong. To impose upon a neighbour's ignorance or necessity, to overreach him in a bargain, to supplant and undermine him, if it be done with any thing of art or address, is so far from being reckoned a reproach, that they who do such things, boast and glory in them. But, let us appeal from the wicked world to the holy word of God, and see how such conduct is characterised there; and behold we shall find, that the deceitful, as well as the bloody man, is abhorred of the Lord: that false weights and measures, and every sort of false and double dealing, are an abomination to the Lord; and that they who do such things shall never inherit the kingdom of God.

4thly, We must not oppress our neighbour, nor by fraud or violence seize upon what belongs to him. Oppression is a sin that has a multitude of cries against it, and therefore will, sooner or later, be very terribly revenged. The word of God cries aloud against it, Hos. iv. 1, "For the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." Isa. v. 8, "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field till there be no place, that they may be placed alone." Jerem. ix. 4, "Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother."

The oppressed cry against it, and the Lord has all along had an ear very ready to hear their cry. Israel, oppressed in Egypt, cries and groans, till at length the Lord heard their cries and groans, and avenged them of the oppressors. The tyrant who sunk them down with labour, was himself sunk like lead in the mighty waters. James v. 4, "Behold the hire of the labourers, which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." Acts vii. 34, "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, which is in Egypt,

and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them."

The world cries against it. The unbiassed, unprejudiced spectators of oppression, will cry out against it, though they have no religion, and will be ready to applaud the justice of God when it is executed upon the oppressors. "When the wicked perish there is shouting," says Solomon.

Conscience cries against it. Even the conscience of the oppressor himself; it often rises upon him with fearful challenges, and gives him many a fearful blow, when the world knows nothing about it. What a miserable night did Darius pass in his palace, after he had put Daniel into the den of lions!

Secondly, To love our neighbour, is to do him all the kind and good offices we can. As the cause is best known by its effects, and the tree by its fruits; so the love we owe to our neighbour will be best understood by condescending on some of its fruits and effects, which I call the duties and offices of love; and they are these following,

1st, Praying for them, 1 Tim. ii. 1, "I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all men." The expression, first of all, not only says, that prayer is a principal part of worship, but perhaps it may intimate, that the concerns of God and Christ in the world should be the first, and not the last part of our prayers, as they commonly are. The order of the petitions in the Lord's prayer, I think, plainly teaches this, though the most part do not advert to it. The first three petitions are for the public interests of Christ in the world; "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;" and then follows the petitions with respect to our own particular concerns. This likewise seems to have been the mind of the famous Westminster divines, compilers of our Confession, in their directory for public worship annexed thereto, which you may consult at your leisure.

The prayers of saints are the church's common stock, of which every member does partake; and those who love

God, and mankind for God's sake, will pray for the conversion of the ignorant and wicked world; for by this means God would be glorified, and immortal souls saved from eternal ruin. If the effectual fervent prayer of one righteous man avails much, certainly the joint prayers and supplications of many righteous ones would avail more. Let us, therefore, in our addresses at a throne of grace, mind others as well as ourselves: let us mind not only our fellow Christians, but also our fellow men. Some have observed, that in seeking for others, they have obtained liberally for themselves.

2dly, We must forgive them injuries and offences which they have done against us. Therefore our Lord says, Mark xi. 25, 26, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." It is accounted a great spirit in the world to be irritable, and immediately in a flame upon the least provocation: but if we would measure greatness of spirit by the scripture, we shall find it is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression; and he was a king who said so.

Man is naturally a proud and revengeful creature, very ready to offer injuries to others, very unfit to bear any offered unto himself; "But dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord," Rom. xii. 19. God bears a thousand times more at our hands, than we have to bear at the hands of any of our fellow creatures; yet for his Son's sake, he both forgives and forgets our numberless provocations. And how can those be thought to share of this forgiveness, who will neither forgive nor forget the injuries they receive from their neighbours, or those who pretend to forgive injuries, but at the same time will not forget them! Surely God commands us to forgive injuries, when he forbids us to harbour malice and ill will against our neighbour, and he has set us an example herein, in that he forgets the sins he forgives.

If it be asked, whether suing our neighbour at the law be consistent with that love and forgiveness we owe unto him? I answer with the apostle, that the law is good if a man use it lawfully. Medicine is good on some occasions and in some circumstances; and in others, you know, it may be as pernicious: so it is with the law. And I judge, that lawsuits or processes are not inconsistent with Christianity, or with the particular duty I am recommending, if the following things be duly observed.

(1.) That they be not commenced for trifles. It argues a litigious, wicked and selfish disposition, to be making court pleas and requiring oaths for every little petty trifle that will not bear its own expense.

(2.) That they be not commenced, but upon a just and righteous cause. Much unrighteous gain has been made under the colour of law and justice, when neither the law nor the judge could be blamed, but the party pursuers and defenders.

(3.) That we offer peace, and to compound the matter, before we go to law. He who loves his neighbour as himself, will propose terms of agreement, or submit the matter to the arbitration of neutral persons rather than go to law. And if none of these is yielded to, he does not forfeit the character of a peaceably disposed man though he should take the benefit of the law.

(4.) That we do not harbour malice and revenge against such as we are obliged to go to law with.

3dly, We must honour them: for so the apostle exhorts, 1 Pet. ii. 17. Besides the honour due to those in authority over us, or that are any how exalted above us, there is an honour due unto all men, or to human nature, as it subsists in every individual of the species, let them be never so mean and unprofitable in society. Nay, suppose them to be bad men, we are still to respect them as men: for any thing we know they may be elect vessels; they may be among those for whom Christ died, and in some particulars, they may be better than we.

The Jews, we are told, would not willingly tread on the

smallest piece of paper in their way, but take it up, lest the name of God should be on it. Whatever superstition was in this usage, apply it unto men, and it is solid religion; trample on no man, as thou knowest not but a work of grace may be there: yea, suppose it evident that hitherto there has been no such work, yet thou knowest not what God designs to work there.

4thly, We must put the most favourable constructions on their words and actions that they will bear. The charity the apostle so strongly recommends, has this property among many others, that "it thinketh no evil," 1 Cor. xiii. 5. Some are such sons of Belial, that one knows not how to speak to them; they take everything that is said or done, in the very worst sense, being jealous and suspicious of every body: but he who loves his neighbour as himself, thinks well of his fellow men, and is willing to impute any wrong they do him, to inadvertency and mistake, rather than to design: he makes suitable allowances for men's natural temper, their constitution, education, calling and customs. And indeed, if we would learn to make these allowances one to another, we should live in far more peace, love and charity than we do.

But it argues a strange malignity of spirit to take every thing in the worst sense; that when your neighbour's conduct may be favourably construed, then you will be at pains to put a blot upon it, and expose him.

5thly, We must relieve their necessities as occasion offers. For as the apostle James says, "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?" James ii. 15, 16. Now the general rules for charity may be reduced to three. (1.) Our neighbour's necessity. "Distributing to the necessity of the saints," Rom. xii. 13. The necessity of some is great, the necessity of others is extreme: some need more, others less. Christian prudence must judge in those cases, and make a difference. (2.) God's oppor-

tunity, by which I mean the occasions and opportunities which God in the course of his providence lays before us, for relieving our fellow men in want or misery. The apostle speaks of this, Gal. vi. 10. So long as the world is filled with so much misery and distress, we cannot miss frequent providential calls to sympathy with and relieving our fellow men. (3.) Our own ability, 2 Cor. viii. 12, "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." God has placed people in different stations and characters in life. Those that are rich in this world, are charged to be rich in good works, and ready to distribute to the necessity of their neighbours. Those in lower circumstances are not exempted from deeds of charity; but must give, according as God has blessed and prospered them in worldly things.

6thly, We must warn, admonish and reprove, in reference to sin. We must warn one another of snares in the way, as fellow travellers towards Zion; and we must admonish and reprove our brother and neighbour, and not suffer sin to lie upon him, Lev. xix. 17. True indeed, much wisdom and discretion are requisite to the right administration of reproof. The different tempers, education, callings and stations of men are to be considered, and proper allowances made for them. The proper times and seasons for such duties ought likewise to be observed; for if these circumstances are not attended to, the reproof, however well intended by the person who gives it, comes to be an act of very great indiscretion, and it has no good effect upon the person to whom it is given. If we saw men running upon a precipice, common humanity would teach us to warn them of their danger: so, when we see men living without God in the world, walking in the broad way that leads to destruction, if we have any bowels of mercy, as the elect of God, we will warn our fellow men, our kindred souls, that they bethink themselves, and turn from the evil of their ways, lest they come to the place of torment.

Lastly, Whatsoever we would that men should do to us, let us do the same to them. This is an admirable maxim, and would make neighbourhood most comfortable, were it duly observed. Put thyself in your neighbour's circumstances, and then what you would wish him to do to you, do you the same to him; and what you would complain of as an injury from him, be sure not to offer it unto him.

I am next to consider the manner of this love; we are to love our neighbour as ourself. Now, this is not to be understood, as if we were to love our neighbour with the same degree of love that we love ourselves: for this would be impossible. But the analogy betwixt the love we owe to our neighbour, and that which we bear to ourselves, seems to stand in two things.

(1.) We must love our neighbour, with the same sincerity that we love ourselves. There is a principle of self-love and self-preservation in every creature, much more in rational creatures, as man is. In the exercise of this principle we are naturally very sincere and serious; every man most sincerely wishes all happiness to himself, though, alas! mankind often mistake happiness, or the means which lead thereunto. Now, our love to our neighbour must be like that to ourselves in point of sincerity, according to the apostle's exhortation, Rom. xii. 9, and 1 John iii. 18, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." Say not to your indigent neighbour, be you warmed and be you filled, and yet not give unto him the things that are needful for the body: this is a piece of cruel hypocrisy; yet how many are guilty of it, of whom better things might be expected! They can lament the case of distressed neighbours in very pathetic strains, and express the strongest wishes to have them in better circumstances; yet they never contribute any thing towards it, though it be in their power. Their charity is a labour of the lip only, not a labour of good deeds: they can spare a few words, but not a few pence.

(2.) We must love our neighbour, with the same constancy that we love ourselves. We always love ourselves,

and we should always love our neighbour. Christ's love is constant. John xiii. 1, "Jesus having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end." Our love, in imitation of his, should be constant; and we should likewise continue in all the proper expressions and offices of love, and not weary in well doing, even though we meet with very ungrateful returns from men: for if we act from a right principle, we shall in nowise lose our reward.

In the *last* place, let us view the importance of this second commandment, in that it is said to be like unto the first. And it is so,

1st, In respect to the authority of it. It has the same sanction with the first. God has interposed the very same authority for the love of our brother whom we see, as for the love of himself whom we have not seen; and therefore neglecting the one, as well as the other, implies a contempt of his legislative authority. It is said in the preface to the commands, "God spake all these words." He did not speak the first and second commandment from his own mouth, and the rest by a substitution; but he spake all and every one of them; so that they have all the same authority.

2dly, In respect to the comprehensiveness of it. As the love of God includes all the first table duties, or all that service we owe to God; so the love of our neighbour comprehends all the duties of the second table. Hence the apostle says, "Love is the fulfilling of the law," Rom. xiii. 8, and Gal. v. 14, "All the law is fulfilled in one word, which is this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

3dly, In respect to the reward of it. The reward of both is a reward of grace and not of debt. There is a reward in both: the work is its own reward, according to the Psalmist's observation, Psal. xix. 11. And there is a reward for both, even eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

4thly, In respect to the difficulty of it. People think it a natural and easy thing to love God. Who would not love him, say they. But unless the principle of love be im-

planted in us by the Spirit, we neither can nor will love him. The same may be said of the love of our neighbour: we will never love mankind from a right principle, and in a way acceptable to God, until it be freely given us of God.

And now, I shall shut up this subject in some practical improvement. This doctrine reaches reproof to several sorts of persons.

First, To selfish souls, who confine all their love, care and concern to themselves. They make themselves the centre, and all things else the circumference: if it be well with themselves, they care not who it go ill with: they are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph, nor for the afflictions of any in the world besides themselves. Persons of this character are ranked among the filthy vermin the apostle says should creep out in the latter days; yea, they are placed in the very front of them, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2. No man is born for himself, either in the natural or spiritual birth; for God hath made men in society, with a mutual connexion and dependence on one another: therefore a selfish man is the very bane of society, as well as the reproach of Christianity: he deserves not a place in the world, much less in the church.

Secondly, To those who harbour malice and revenge in their hearts against their neighbour; Eph. iv. 31, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." Malice is one of the most vile and barbarous passions in human nature. Were I to describe it, I would take the model from the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians, making it in every thing the opposite of charity; and then I would say, malice suffereth nothing, is most unkind, most envious, vaunteth itself, and is puffed up, behaves itself most unseemly, seeks its own always, is easily provoked, thinketh all evil, rejoiceth not in the truth, but in iniquity, beareth nothing, believeth nothing, hopeth nothing, and endureth nothing. Is not this a monstrous picture! yet how many harbour this ugly serpent in their breasts, nights, and days, and months, and years? Instead of letting one sun, they can

let many years of suns go down upon their wrath; and when opportunity offers of revenging themselves, they can do it with as much keenness and cruelty, as they could have done the day they received the provocation. Of such persons I would say, as Jacob to Simeon and Levi: "O my soul, come not thou into their secret, unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel."

Thirdly, To those who envy their neighbours for every thing they possess better than themselves. James iv. 5, "The spirit that is in us lusteth to envy." Some think nothing good enough for themselves, and any thing too good for their neighbours, and so they always look upon them with an invidious eye. My brethren, purge out this as a piece of the old leaven; allow the great God to distribute his favours unto others in what manner and measure he pleases, without grudging or repining. If you have the love of God in you, you will likewise have a right and charitable frame of spirit towards your neighbour and all that is his. The mischief of envy is exceeding great: it murdered righteous Abel; it sold Joseph into Egypt; and it delivered Jesus Christ into the hands of Pilate to be condemned to the cross.

Fourthly, To those who rejoice at the calamities of their neighbours. Some are of such a waspish malignant temper, that nothing gives them so much pleasure as to hear of evil befalling others. The breaking of their character, their credit, or their substance, is like oil to their bones; they take pleasure to hear it, and as great pleasure to rehearse it. Well Solomon says, "He who is glad at calamities, shall not go unpunished."

Fifthly, To those who, like the Jews, love their friends, but hate their enemies. "If ye love them which love you, and do good to them which do good to you, what thank have you?" But Christ calls you to love your enemies, and return good for evil, blessing for cursing, and prayers

for persecution and spiteful usage. You have heard, that the neighbour in my text, is every one partaking of human nature: so that though you may love some more than others, yet you must love all, and bear hatred to none.

Let me exhort you, to love your neighbour as yourself. Love all mankind for God's sake, and all the saints for Christ's sake.

(1.) If you love not your neighbour, the love of God is not in you: "For he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Where there is no effect there is no cause: now the love of our neighbour is the certain effect of the love of God, which can never fail; therefore, where the former is not, the latter cannot be.

(2.) It is the end of the commandment, and the fulfilling of the law; so that while you neglect love, you do nothing to the purpose.

(3.) Consider the influence love would have to render society useful and comfortable. It is the want of it that fills the world with thefts, robberies, murders, adulteries, lies and perjuries, covetousness and oppression: so that good men are ready to cry out with the weeping prophet, "O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of way-faring men, that I might leave my people and go from them: for they be all adulterers, and an assembly of treacherous men," Jer. ix. 2. But were we united one to another in the bond of Christian love, we would look every man on the things of others; we would rejoice and weep with one another, and so the journey through the world would be much more easy and comfortable.

SERMON X.

CHRIST'S VICTORY AND TRIUMPH OVER PRINCIPALITIES
AND POWERS.

COLLOSS. ii. 15.—“ And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

IN the eighth verse of this chapter, the apostle states the controversy betwixt himself and some false brethren, who, he heard, had risen in the church at Colosse, and reduces it to three heads; principles of abused philosophy, superstitious and foolish rites, which were merely the inventions of men, and the Mosaic ceremonies, abolished by the death of Christ. He argues against them all, by showing that Christ is a most complete Saviour; having no less than the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him, and consequently such as are in him must be complete, as to every thing necessary for their salvation. In the eleventh verse and downwards, he reasons more particularly against the Mosaic ceremonies, especially circumcision, which, it seems, was at that time urged, as essential to salvation. His argument against it is this: believers have in Christ the thing signified by that ordinance, viz., the circumcision of the heart; which consists in putting off the body of sin flowing from original corruption. And he amplifies this argument by showing, that we have not only the thing signified, but also the external seal, viz., baptism, which is more expressive of the grace of God than circumcision was.

He shows further, that they had no need of circumcision in the flesh, because they had in Christ all that was necessary for justification as well as for sanctification; God hav-

ing given them the pardon of their sins through Christ, when they were uncircumcised, being Gentiles. Having mentioned the grace of God in forgiving their trespasses, in the next verse, he assigns the ground of this remission in the fourteenth verse; "Blotting out the hand writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."

The law, as a covenant of works, and the law as appendaged with ceremonial ordinances, was cancelled by the blood of Christ; taken out of the way, and nailed to his cross. The obligatory bond of the law, unto which the sentence of every man's conscience against himself was a subscription, and unto which the Jews did subscribe, in a special manner, by their ceremonial observances, was, by the death of Christ, torn in pieces. What madness then must it be to renew that obligation, by observing the ceremonial law!

The text is an amplification of this argument, whereby the apostle shows, that a full and complete salvation is purchased for us, by the death of Christ.

Believers, by that death, are not only freed from every thing that could militate against them in law, but they are also delivered from the power of such enemies, as rule over them by force or violence. "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

He had said before, that the obligatory bond of the law was nailed to the cross of Christ. He adds now, that in and by the same cross, Satan, with all his auxiliaries, our spiritual enemies, are spoiled and triumphed over. And after one is assured of all this, what does he need more? what has he more to fear? is there any need for men to make an addition to such a complete Saviour? In these words, (1.) you have an account of a great victory which our Lord Jesus Christ obtained. And here notice, first the parties over whom he was victorious. They are designated by the pompous titles of principalities and powers, that is evil angels, Satan, and the whole

apostate tribes. He calls them principalities and powers, because of the power which they have over men, in consequence of their sin. They have no natural right and power over men; but when men by sin had cast off their allegiance to God, they were judicially given over to the vassalage and slavery of Satan, the head of the apostate tribe: And the power which he has over them, while they continue his subjects, is great and extensive. Some think also that the title of principalities and powers intimates, that there are different ranks and orders among the bad angels.

(2.) Notice the kind of victory which Christ obtained over these principalities and powers. It was not a destroying them out of hand, as to their simple being: no; Satan and the powers of darkness exist to this very day, and shall exist for ever. The victory then consisted in spoiling these enemies of God and men. Christ spoiled Satan of all his power, armour, and riches. He was dispossessed of the spoil which he took up, and proudly boasted of, when Adam fell. The original word, here rendered spoiled, properly signifies to strip or make naked, and carries a manifest allusion to the custom of conquerors, who used to strip the conquered of their armour, and hang it upon a pillar, which they frequently erected in the very place, where the victory was won. Thus Christ having obtained the victory over Satan, stripped him of all his weapons, and hung them for a trophy upon his cross: so that when the Jews fixed the cross of Christ in the ground, to make it stand erect, they raised a pillar, though they knew it not, on which Satan's whole armour was hung up and exposed to public view.

(3.) In these words you have Christ's triumph over the conquered. "He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them," or triumphed them, as it is in the original; that is to say, led them in triumph. Still there is a manifest allusion to the custom of conquerors in their triumphs. The heads or chief men of the conquered party, were taken and bound in chains by two and two, or more;

and in this disgraceful manner they went sometimes before, and sometimes behind the triumphal chariot of the conqueror: and this tragical scene was always beheld by a vast crowd of people, for the honour of the victors, and for the shame of the captives.

Thus Christ having conquered Satan, with all the powers of darkness, led him in triumph, and exposed him before God and all the holy angels, as an enemy conquered and made captive. But of this again.

In the last place, observe, when and where all this was done. Why, it was at the death and upon the cross of Christ. Even when and where Satan thought to have had the day, by putting to death the innocent Jesus, were he and all his powers conquered and triumphed over, by the Lord of life, to their eternal shame and mortification. The words rendered *in it*, refer the victory and triumph to the cross, whereof the apostle had been speaking, in the preceding verse.

DOCTRINE. Christ having, by his death upon the cross, obtained the victory over Satan, with all the powers of darkness, led them in open triumph.

In discoursing on this subject, I shall, first, speak of the victory which Christ obtained over Satan: secondly, of the triumph; and then make some improvement of what is said.

In speaking of the victory which Christ obtained over Satan, I shall, first, show the ground of the quarrel betwixt them. Secondly, how Christ obtained the victory over him by his death upon the cross. Thirdly, I shall name some properties of this victory.

I return to the first thing proposed, viz. To show the ground of the quarrel betwixt Christ and Satan: for, as victory supposes a war going before, so a war must be founded upon some quarrel, upon some offence given or received, either real or imaginary.

The ground of the quarrel, then, was twofold. *First*, Satan, with his angels, left their first habitation and fell, Jude 6 ver. Their being said to have left it seems to in-

timate their dissatisfaction with it. They were not pleased with their condition, though it was the same with those angels who stood, therefore they left it, and set up for themselves, in opposition to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The apostle Peter says, they sinned. Now consider what a terrible thing it was to set an affront upon God, in his highest court; to sin against him even in heaven, the place where he dwells, and you will soon and easily perceive a sufficient foundation for a quarrel against them: even a quarrel to be eternally pursued. They were the first inventors and founders of that evil thing called sin, which is the very opposite of God and all good. And if it be true which is alleged by some, that the point of their first sin was directed against the Son of God, as he was to be manifested in man's nature, then certainly it became Christ, in a special manner, to avenge the quarrel.

Secondly, Satan, the head of the apostate spirits, betrayed our first parents into sin, by which the covenant between God and man was broken, and the whole world brought in guilty before God, Gen. iii. 4, 5. He misrepresented God unto man, and he continues to do so still. He also misrepresents man unto God; for as is his name, so is his nature and practice. He is the devil, the calumniator, the malignant, and the very fire-brand of the whole creation of God. He brought two things into the world, which were solely his own, for they are essentially opposite to the nature and works of God: these were sin and death. He brought sin, that ugly monster, into the very garden where God had placed the man; and from thence he sent it out into the wide world, where it has remained for about six thousand years; and to this very day God is not able to look upon it. Then he introduced death into the world: that is not of God's making either. Death is of a heterogeneous nature. Hence the apostle, Rom. v. 12. tells us, that it entered by sin: it entered in at the same crevice with sin, and by the same hand, viz. Satan. And now we may easily imagine, what joy and satisfaction the malignant spirit, with his tribe, would have at the thought

of having ushered sin and death into God's dominion. When God looked at first upon his own works, he was well pleased, because they were all very good: so, when Satan looked upon sin and death, the works which he had made, he was, to be sure, also well pleased. He would boast and triumph like a Nebuchadnezzar, saying, this I have done for the honour of my majesty, and for the support of my kingdom, in opposition to God.

Here then you will easily perceive a broad foundation for a second quarrel, a quarrel of a public nature, for the first was personal; but this was public, inasmuch as the sons of men were concerned in it; and therefore Christ avenged it in our nature, and in our name, as our public head and representative. While the proud apostate was triumphing, while he was defying the honour and armies of the living God, one combatant, a match and more for him, appears upon the field, and proclaims war against him and his seed, Gen. iii. 15. As this war was soon proclaimed, so it was instantly and constantly carried on: so that among the first sons which Adam had, there was a parting of the seeds; God got Abel, Satan got Cain, and so it went on from father and son on both sides, through the several periods of the church, till at length God incarnate came upon the field, and in his own person fought Satan, and obtained a complete victory over him, while himself seemed to be overcome. And this leads me to the second thing proposed, which was to show how Christ obtained the victory over Satan, by his death upon the cross.

First, There was a divine appointment in the death of Christ, to spoil Satan with all his auxiliaries, Heb. ii. 14. 1 John iii. 8. It was the great design of his enemies to get him put to death, and especially the death of the cross: for then, to be sure, they thought they would have done with him, he would trouble them no more; and his going out of the world in such a disgraceful manner, would make his name hateful to mankind. And no doubt Satan promised himself great things, with respect to the promoting and securing the interests of his kingdom, if he could get

Christ put to the death of the cross. To believe in one who was crucified, was a stumbling block to the Jews; and to look for salvation from a crucified man, appeared a most ridiculous fancy to the Gentiles. But behold with wonder the height and the depth of the manifold wisdom of God, whose ways are not as man's ways! By this determination and appointment, the dead man, nay, the crucified man, pulls down Satan's whole fabric about his ears. The shameful despised cross, having the wisdom and power of God in it, is made a pillar to hang up Satan's armour on; a triumphal chariot, behind which he, with all his auxiliaries, must be dragged in chains: the Father and friends of the crucified Jesus, looking on all the while, rejoicing. Thus you see the force of a divine appointment: it can break through and baffle the wisdom of men and devils: it can strengthen the spoiled against the strong: it can bring glory out of shame, life out of death, and victory out of conquest.

Secondly, Christ, by his death upon the cross, took away sin, and delivered the elect from death, whereof Satan had the power: and hereby he was conquered and his spoil taken from him. He is the Lamb of God, who took away the sin of the world. From whence does Satan get the pompous title of God of this world? Why, he derives it from sin and death, upon which his kingdom was erected, and by which it stands. If then the two pillars be removed by a mighty one, the whole superstructure falls to the ground. His kingdom is departed from him. Now as to the first of these pillars, namely, sin, Christ brake it down, inasmuch as by his death upon the cross he fully satisfied the demands of the broken law, which was the strength of that pillar: "for the strength of sin is the law." And as for the other pillar, viz. death, it must necessarily fall upon the removal of the former, which is the strength and sting of it. Moreover, Christ, by his own death, is said to have swallowed it up in victory; and he will pursue that victory, till there shall not be such a thing as death in all his dominions. Now, if by the merit and power of Christ's

death, the elect world be delivered from sin in its guilt, dominion, and being, and from death in its sting, are they not delivered from Satan? where is his authority over them? is not his sceptre taken away? and is he not a conquered enemy?

Thirdly, Satan was spoiled by the death of Christ, through the imminent hand which he had all along, in bringing about this death. For understanding what I mean, you will observe, that Satan, by presuming to tempt Christ, and by his hatching and contriving the death of Christ, forfeited all his authority and power over men; and that being forfeited, he is a spoiled enemy.

Satan's power over men was given him by way of commission from God, for the punishment of sin. And as every commission has its limitations, which being broken through, the commission is forfeited, so had this commission of Satan. It was confined to sinners; and therefore if he meddled with one who was not a sinner, he exceeded the bounds of his commission, and so it became forfeit. Now, the devil not only set upon a man who was not a sinner, but upon the Son of God himself. He attacked him in the wilderness, and being repulsed, had the impudence to renew his temptation: and it would seem he tempted him frequently. He stirred up the people against him. He entered into the heart of Judas, one of his disciples, by whom he was betrayed. And at the death of Christ, the powers of darkness, by the divine permission, set upon him, and did their utmost, but were foiled. The holy and just God, by this method, took the wise in their own craftiness. He suffered Satan to fall into the blunder of meddling with Christ, and carrying on his death, that he might forfeit his power over men, and so be spoiled of all, by that very thing which he thought would be an absolute security for all.

Fourthly, The death of Christ was the completing part of the work of redemption; and so was, as it were, the fatal stroke to Satan. When a man receives one blow after another, till he fall, the last blow is said to kill him. So

it was here. Christ gave Satan many blows and bruises in his life; but those which he gave him at the last were the fatal ones. Many a blow he gave him in the midst of his boasting over fallen man. That was one, the promise of the seed of the woman to bruise his head. When he proclaimed war against him at his incarnation he gave him another; and many more in the days of his flesh; yet for all these he would not be quiet, but came often unto him. Therefore when he came to the place where he was to die, he took that very cross which Satan had prepared for him, and with its mighty force dashed out his brains, bruised him and trod him like mortar; while Satan, with all his power, could not break one bone of him. All this Christ did in the name of his people, as their head and representative.

I proceed now to mention some properties of this victory which Christ obtained. And,

First, It was a very dear-bought victory. Victories are not gained without wounds and blood on both sides. So it was here. Precious blood, even the blood of the Son of God was shed in the field of battle, and yet not one drop of it was lost: nay, the conqueror himself died, and yet he obtained the victory. The prince of life was killed, that principalities and powers might be spoiled. Surely the spoils which he distributes among believers, whom he allowed to remain at home, should be highly valued, since they were purchased at no less expense than the life and blood of a divine Redeemer.

Secondly, It was a righteous victory. "If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully." Christ's conquest was not an unjust one, like many of the conquests gained by the heroes and potentates of the world. Alexander, and the Cæsars of old, conquered countries, cities and kingdoms, taking the spoil to themselves, while they had no just right to it, but only wanted to aggrandise themselves, and purchase a fame for heroic achievements, that might last in the world while they themselves were gone; but the Captain of our salvation

made no unjust conquest over Satan and the powers of darkness, for they detained his lawful subjects in captivity: was it not righteous then to deliver them?

Lastly, It was a most glorious victory. Never was there a victory attended with so great glory to the conqueror, and with so great shame to the conquered. Had Satan, with his auxiliaries, been spoiled by holy angels, he might have alleged that he met with his match; or had he been spoiled by a mere act of omnipotence, he might have boasted that he had put God to his utmost; but to be conquered by the human nature, at which he had a particular spite, and which was lower than his own, to fall by a man, by a dying man, a crucified man, a dead man! what everlasting shame and mortification was this! Moreover, as Satan prevailed over men by an act of subtilty, so Christ prevailed against him, not by a mere act of power, but by righteousness and wisdom; for had he been to have prevailed by power, there was no occasion to assume the human nature.

I come now to speak to Christ's triumph upon this victory. The question is, whether the expression in the text is merely figurative, or if there was a real triumph over the principalities and powers of darkness, by exposing them as conquered enemies, and that too, in a most public manner before God, before all the holy angels, and perhaps before the spirits of just men made perfect. I go in with the last, for the following reasons:

First, The original words in the text, by which the triumph is expressed, intimate the reality of it. The word rendered to make a "shew," is the same with that in Matt. i. 19. which is rendered to make a public example. Moreover, in Num. xxv. 4. when Moses was commanded to take the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word for hanging them up, by the same word with that in our text. Again, the word rendered "openly," signifies in the sight of others, and in the most public manner.

Secondly, The devil and his angels, being intelligent creatures, were capable of being really exposed and put

openly to shame, when defeated in their designs. And therefore, to object that the allusion in our text must be explained, as that in the preceding verse with respect to the law, is not solid: for sin and the law are not persons, but things, and so not capable of being put to shame; but it is evidently otherwise in this case.

And to add no more. The nature and end of a triumph in war, unto which there is a manifest allusion here, leads to this sense. A triumph was always celebrated openly before a multitude; nay, often there were some who shouted all the way, victory, victory; and all this for the honour of the victor, and the shame of the captives: so that if a triumph was carried on privately, it was contrary to its nature, and lost the end of its institution.

I pass on to the application.

Is it so, that Jesus Christ, having by his death on the cross “spoiled principalities and powers, made a shew of them openly?” Then, in the *first* place, all who fight under Satan, are conquered with him. When a king or general falls in the field of battle, all his supporters fall with him, and are said to be conquered. So Christ having spoiled Satan upon the cross, did at that very instant reach a deadly blow to every one of his supporters. Hence, the law’s obligatory bond upon you, believers, was nailed to the cross. The old man of sin was crucified with him. The world was conquered. Death was swallowed up in victory. And, in a word, everything that could militate for Satan against the saints, was removed out of the way.

Secondly, Christians have no ground to be ashamed of the cross of Christ; but, on the contrary, to boast and glory in it. The God of glory having spoiled Satan upon the cross, and made it a chariot of triumph after the victory, has removed the reproach of it, and made it truly honourable. Therefore, believers, while the carnal noisy world are boasting loudly, some in their wisdom, some in their strength, others in their wealth, let your boasting be all the day-long in the cross of Christ. Faith’s views of the conqueror, faith’s views of the cross as the field of

battle, and the triumphal chariot, will furnish you with the most noble grounds of boasting. Besides, the dignity and honour of Christ's cross should make you boast in your own; for by it Christ puts honour upon you before the world, angels, and men. Hereby he conforms you to himself: and is it not honour to be conformed to him? As he conquered Satan, notwithstanding his cross, nay, by his cross, so he will lead you forth into the field of battle, compassed about with infirmities, pained and borne down with the weight of the cross, and yet you shall return triumphant, even as he did.

Thirdly, By this victory and this triumph, Christ's name is rendered famous for ever. His name, says David, "shall last as the sun." Time has buried the remembrance of persons and events, and especially victories, which once a day made a mighty noise in the world, and that too, in spite of every means used to perpetuate the remembrance of them. The marble pillars, the statues and monuments, by which the potentates of the world hoped to immortalise their memory, are gone to ruins, as well as their founders. But behold, here is a conqueror and a conquest, the remembrance of both which has been kept up in the world for many hundreds of years, and will be kept up when time shall be no more: nay, it will not end with time, but continue through eternity. To preserve the memory of this victory, the Lord's supper is instituted. If therefore those who are strangers to our commonwealth and covenant of promise, ask us what we mean by covering a sacramental table, and sitting down at it; the answer is at hand; it is to perpetuate the famous name of the man Jesus, the Son of God, who, more than seventeen hundred years ago, being nailed hands and feet upon a cross, baffled all the powers of hell.

Fourthly, No wonder that Satan and wicked men are enemies to the cross. The spirits of the conquered party cannot miss to be ruffled and filled with spite against the conqueror. How must the revengeful and proud spirit of Satan be galled and tortured at the thoughts of his being

foiled by the cross of Christ, which he reckoned could secure all? how great must the fretting and anguish of his spirit be? shall we wonder then, that he and his have done, and are still doing to this day what they can, to ruin the reputation of the cross?

Fifthly, Believers, here is great encouragement for you in opposing Satan, and all your spiritual enemies. They are conquered already by the Captain of your salvation. They have all got such a deadly bruise by the cross, that they shall not be able to overcome you. Christ, indeed, could have bruised them so, that they should not have been able to make the least motion against you; but for the glory of his grace, and for the greater mortification of the prince of darkness, he will have him overthrown and trodden upon by the weakest child in all his family. Resist him then, believers, and all his accomplices, as knowing, that every degree of resistance is a degree of conquest over him. And mind always to exercise faith in the death of Christ, as the most effectual means of opposing him. Let faith present the cross of Christ to him, and he will flee from you ashamed.

Lastly, Enemies of Christ, subject yourselves to him. Join this glorious conqueror. Why do you run against the thick bosses of the buckler of the Almighty? why do you harden yourselves against him? do you imagine you can do so, and prosper? Nay, if you will not bow before him, you shall be broken on the wheel of divine vengeance: therefore desert the enemy's camp this day, and give your hearty consent to have your names registered in Christ's muster-roll: throw away the weapons of rebellion, and take unto you the whole armour of God, so shall you at length be conquerors over sin, Satan, death, and hell.

SERMON XI.

THE NATURE OF UNBELIEF OPENED UP, AND ITS PER-
NICIOUS INFLUENCE UPON PROFESSORS OF THE GOS-
PEL ILLUSTRATED.

HEB. iii. 12.—“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

FROM the seventh verse of this chapter, the apostle presses the Hebrews to improve the great doctrine about the gospel-prophet, by alleging a sad example of their fathers, who refused to hear and obey him in the wilderness, and were thereby kept from entering into the promised land. Great miracles were wrought for them both in Egypt and the wilderness; miracles of mercy and of judgment also, by fire, by the earth opening, by fiery serpents, by consuming thousands of them; all which were evidences sufficient to convince them of the wickedness of mistrusting him. But notwithstanding all the wonders both of mercy and of judgment, they were full of pride, murmuring, rebellion, and unbelief; and in this hardened course they continued no less than forty years, until all but two of them, Caleb and Joshua, were consumed. Such were the provocations and temptations of God, that he determined their punishment; the certainty whereof he fixed by an irreversible oath, which is the highest confirmation of vengeance. The matter sworn was, that they should be so far from possessing, that they should not enter into the promised land, ver. 11. “So I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest.” And if we look forward

to the 18th and 19th verses, we shall find that the apostle lays their exclusion from the promised land absolutely and wholly upon their unbelief. They were guilty of many other sins: they were proved rebellious, murmurers, idolaters; but their unbelief was the root which sent forth all these branches,—it was the fountain from which all these bitter waters flowed; and this being the case, the solemn caution in our text follows very naturally the preceding discourse. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

In these words we have, 1. An affectionate appellation, “Brethren.” Those unto whom this apostle wrote were his brethren upon a natural account, at least they were his countrymen, he being by birth a Jew; but he here calls them brethren upon a spiritual account, as being interested in the same family of God with himself; and by this appellation he insinuates himself into their affections, that so the caution might be better received. Hereby he likewise obviates any suspicion that might arise in their minds, as if he had hard thoughts of them; and lets them know, that the best of saints had need to be cautioned against the worst of evils. 2. In the words we have a caution expressed: “Take heed.” The original word signifies properly, to see or behold, as that is an act of sense; and to take heed or beware, an act of the mind; so, by an easy translation, first ‘I see,’ and then ‘I take heed.’ The word imports a constant heedfulness and circumspection. 3. You have the persons concerned in the caution, viz. every individual among the Hebrews. “Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.” The same expression is used, chap. xii. 15, 16. “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.” 4. The thing cautioned against, which is expressed two ways: 1st, In the principle of it, “an evil heart of unbelief;” and, 2dly, In the effects of it, “departing from the living God.” The principle of the evil cautioned against, is “an evil heart of unbelief.” By the ‘heart’ here, we are not to understand

that part of the body commonly so called, nor yet any particular faculty of the soul; but the whole soul, in all its powers and faculties. An evil heart of unbelief, is a very strong expression, and there is certainly more in it than to say, an evil and unbelieving heart. This may be said of the best hearts in this imperfect state. There is no man on earth such a strong and steadfast believer, but he misbelieves ten times for his believing once. An heart of unbelief, then, is a heart that is absolutely under the power of unbelief,—a heart that has unbelief as the habitual and prevailing principle of all its actions. And the expression of an evil heart of unbelief, seems to point out unbelief as the efficient cause of this evil: it renders the heart evil to such a degree, that it departs from the living God. It is a sin of the most malignant influence. It is the root of all apostacy and defection from the profession of the gospel. And if it be inquired, why the apostle calls apostacy from the profession of the gospel a “departing from the living God,” it may be observed, that possibly the Hebrews did not think, that apostacy from Christianity was a departure from the living God. They would plead that they were not turning unto idols or idolatry; but that they were returning, as they thought, to observe the institutions of the living God, which certainly the Jewish institutions once were. But the apostle lets them know, that after the revelation of Christ, and their profession of him, they could not depart from him, without at the same time departing from the living God:—and he here calls God the living God, that he might deter them from the evil he was cautioning them against. If unbelief should prevail so far in them as to make them apostates from the gospel, they would depart from the living God; that is, from the God who lives for ever to take vengeance on them that are backsliders and apostates. This consideration of God being the living God, is full either of comfort or terror to us, according as we are interested in him. If we have his favour and friendship, then it is comfortable to think that He who is our friend

lives for ever ; and if we are enemies to him, as all are by nature—or if we are turned to be his enemies after a solemn profession of friendship—let us remember, that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Thus, you see, the same promise that drops comfort and sweetness to the godly, drops nothing but gall and worm-wood to the wicked.

DOCTRINE.—It concerns the professors of Christianity to take great heed, lest there be in any of them an absolutely prevailing principle of unbelief.

I. I shall mention some things plainly implied in this text and doctrine.

II. Open the nature of unbelief, and show you wherein it consists.

III. Lay down some propositions regarding unbelief, which may further discover its heinous nature and hurtful tendency.

IV. Inquire into that influence which unbelief has upon some professors, to make them apostates from their profession, and so depart from the living God.

Lastly, Apply.

I. I am to mention some things plainly implied in this text and doctrine. These are,

1st, The professors of Christianity need to be stirred up to circumspection, and a godly jealousy over themselves.

Thus the apostle stirs up the Hebrews in our text, and likewise in the twelfth chapter, ver. 15, 16; and he expresses himself much after the same manner to the church at Corinth, 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3. “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy. For I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” There is a causeless jealousy and suspicion which some have about their brethren, arising from their own credulous and invidious tempers, which is very hurtful to Christian society. But a holy care and concern about our brethren, discovering

itself in warning, and exhorting, and provoking them to love and good works, is very becoming, both in ministers and private Christians.

Many professors, indeed, take this in bad part; they think themselves too good to have any fears or jealousies entertained of them either by themselves or others. But such persons are proud, high-minded, and fearless; and, for all their confidence, they will fall, when those who fear always stand firm. Therefore, suffer the word of exhortation; take cautions and warnings in good part, and as necessary for you in this dark ensnaring world, though you may be already established in the truth, 2 Pet. i. 12.

2dly, A man may imagine himself to be a true believer in Christ, while unbelief absolutely prevails in his heart. This is necessarily implied in the text. If unbelief reigning in the heart were a thing that presently discovered itself to the person in whom it resides, there would be no need of so much fear, caution, and jealousy about it as the text recommends. But the matter is not so. For though unbelief be the greatest of sins, yet the place of its residence, which is the heart, helps to conceal it, especially from those who have no acquaintance with their hearts. Yea, the hearts of the best are such, that none can discover all that is in them, but he whose prerogative it is to search the hearts, Jer. xvii. 10. Besides, unbelief works inwardly in the powers of the soul, and it may work for a long time before the effects of it be discernible. It is not so with other sins, such as pride, covetousness, and revenge: when any of these prevail in the heart, the effects of them are easily discerned. But unbelief may dwell long in the soul, and be working in the understanding, will, and affections, long before any effects of it are noticed, either by the parties themselves or by others. And hence it is that so many are quite mistaken about their state; like the church of Laodicea, they imagine they are rich, and increased with goods, while in reality they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," Rev. iii. 17.

3dly, Though a principle of unbelief in the heart lies very favourable for concealment, yet it may be discovered, and when discovered may be cast out. This is likewise implied in the apostle's exhortation to the Hebrews. If any of them, upon serious examination, found a prevalent principle of unbelief in their hearts, they were not there-upon to despair, or to think that because they had not the faith of God's elect as yet, therefore they would never obtain it. To think after this manner, is still to harbour the principle of unbelief, and to give way to its sophistical arguments, without admitting the solid reasonings of faith.

4thly, Hence it follows, that it is the duty of every Christian to be much employed in the great work of self-examination, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. This is a duty from which no Christian is exempted, whatever be his station in the world or in the church of Christ. However shining his gifts are, and however high his attainments may be, it is his duty and interest to examine and search his own heart, as well as the weakest and meanest Christian; for it is possible that the root of the matter may not be in him, notwithstanding these goodly appearances; and even though the root of the matter be in him, yet self-examination is necessary for the discovery of those filthy weeds which grow up beside it, and threaten to suppress the precious planting of the Lord in the heart.

II. These things being premised, I proceed to open up the nature of unbelief, and to show you wherein it consists.

1st, In the first place, in order to understand the nature of unbelief, there are two distinctions of it which we must observe: the first of these is into *negative* and *positive* unbelief.

Negative unbelief is, when men have not faith, or do not believe, though they never had the means of grace. Those who do not believe the gospel are called unbelievers or infidels, though they never heard it. So Paul, directing the church of Corinth about their public worship, says, "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those

that are unlearned, or unbelievers," *i. e.* heathens or pagans, these are said to be unbelievers, though they cannot be charged with an evil heart of unbelief, as it is meant in the text.

Positive unbelief is the sin of those who hear the gospel, and is committed either by refusing to believe the gospel, or by rejecting the faith of it, after we have publicly professed it, and so departing from the living God.

Some discover and express their unbelief, by despising the gospel, and the means of grace to such a degree, as that they will not take on the profession of it; and, like Gallio, "they care for none of these things." Others make a profession of the gospel, and are thereupon admitted into the external privileges, but by and by they are offended; they draw back and apostatize; and so their unbelief is expressed in rejecting the truths of the gospel already received.

The second distinction of unbelief is, into *notional* and *practical*. *Notional* unbelief, or unbelief in the mind, consists in refusing to admit the gospel revelation, as to the truth and necessity of it, or refusing to apply the same in particular to the soul for its salvation. Some, I say, are so bold as to reject the whole gospel revelation, as a cunningly devised fable. The mystery of a crucified Christ appears foolishness to them: they reckon, that men, by a vigorous exertion of the moral powers of their minds, are capable of pleasing God so as to be accepted of him. Now, this is unbelief in the grossest sense; yet there are many such unbelievers in the world.

But then there are others, in whose hearts unbelief resides in a more refined dress. Those give their assent to the whole gospel revelation, as a truth in itself; nay, they approve of it as a thing good in itself and necessary; but they never believe it with particular application to themselves; they will not trust in Christ for their salvation, and they will not believe that the gospel breathes grace and good-will to them in particular. They are either careless and indifferent about the matter, or, if they do inquire,

they stumble at one of two things, either the validity of their claim to embrace Christ, or Christ's willingness to receive them; and those who continue to the end in this way, perish as unbelievers.

Practical unbelief resides in those who profess that they know God, and that they believe in him. Of these the apostle speaks, Tit. i. ult. The pretended faith of such persons does not regulate their hearts and lives. Their lusts and corruptions absolutely prevail against any impressions of God, or the truths of God, that may be upon their minds, so that they are shut up in unbelief; and this is the case of multitudes who hear the gospel.

2dly, For understanding the nature of unbelief, let it be observed, that the root of it is the original corruption and depravity of human nature. The corrupt heart is the seat of unbelief. It is hatched there, and there it is nourished and strengthened. For, as "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," so with the heart he misbelieves or mistrusts to his own destruction.

Now, that we may see how much there is in the nature of man now totally corrupted, to produce and strengthen his unbelief of the gospel when it is proposed to him, these things following may be considered.

1. There is ignorance and darkness upon the mind, 1 Cor. ii. 14. The natural man—that is, the man who has all and nothing more than what can be derived from the first Adam—does not discern the truths of the gospel, as they are an expression of the holiness, righteousness, and wisdom of God. He does not see their consistency with the glory of God, nor their tendency to his own good; and, therefore, in his judgment, the manifold wisdom of God is foolishness. Now, how is it possible that he should believe the truths of the gospel, while he apprehends them to be the very reverse of what they really are.

2. From this ignorance of the gospel, there arise many prejudices against it. Particularly, there are prejudices, 1st, Against the mysteries of the gospel, unfathomable by the natural understanding. Now, unbelief is the spring

and source of these prejudices, and is the cause of men's rejecting these mysteries, as absurd and unintelligible. But the truth is, it is impossible for a man to be a Christian without admitting of mysteries; that is, believing truths, not because he comprehends them, but because God has revealed them, who certainly would never impose a falsehood upon any of his reasonable creatures. Nevertheless, the prejudices of some against the mysteries of Christianity are so strong, that they reject the whole system, and betake themselves to the religion of nature, as better adapted to their capacities; and yet there are many things in nature, and in the religion of nature, which the acutest understanding cannot account for: nay, there is such an analogy betwixt natural and revealed religion, that there is scarcely any considerable difficulty casts up in the latter, but a difficulty some way analogous to it is found in the former, and which is equally puzzling to our reason to account for it.

2dly, Against the worship of the gospel. There is a purity and spirituality in it, void of all outward pomp and ceremony, that the vain mind of man cannot endure.

Man is naturally fond of a visible object in worship: hence sprung the idolatry of the world,—some worshipping the work of God's hands, as the sun, moon, and stars; others worshipping the work of their own hands, as the Israelites with their golden calf. The Jews had such a pompous service, there was such a splendour and glory in their worship visible to the eye, that they could not endure the simplicity of the Christian institution. The pagans reproachfully upbraided the Christians, because they had no temples, nor altars, nor splendid ceremonies. Hence Christianity was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; neither of them believed it.

3dly, Against the precepts of the gospel. They are too strict for them. A religion that would give scope to men's corrupt lusts and passions, and allow them to live as they please, would soon get a vast number of believers. But the Christian religion calls for the curbing all these vicious

lusts and passions which men indulge themselves in, to the dishonour of God, to the ruin of their souls, and to the hurt of the society whereof they are members. It enjoins men to be holy in all manner of conversation; and this the greatest part of mankind cannot endure: hence they reject the gospel, and perish in their unbelief.

3. There is a rebelliousness in the will, and this arises from the prejudices against the gospel that have been conceived in the mind. Hence our Saviour complains of the Jews, Matt. xxiii. 37; John v. 40. "And ye will not come unto me that ye may have life." He does not by this expression intend only that natural unwillingness which is in all men to come to him, and believe in him; but he points at that particular obstinacy and averseness which was in their wills, arising from their hatred of him and his doctrine: hence they not only did not believe on him—which might have been charged on their natural impotency—but they put forth a positive act of their wills in refusing and rejecting him. And upon this account, the guilt of men's unbelief is absolutely resolved into their wills. The truths of the gospel are laid before them in their nature, use, and end, with the greatest plainness and evidence; and the authority of the great God, requiring their belief of them, is also urged, and they are not only unwilling to believe them, but, by a direct and positive act of their wills, they absolutely refuse to be concerned with them.

4thly, There is an alienation of the affections from God and his truths; and this part of the corrupt nature strengthens unbelief very much: for, where there is not the love of the truth, there will never be a receiving of it. Men's affections are, by sin, turned off their proper centre, and are now fixed upon the creatures and their sinful lusts; and when they see that the tendency of the gospel is to part them and their beloved lusts, presently they are offended. They refuse to believe it, as being that which crosses the main current of their affections. The most endearing promises and invitations expressed in the gospel,

make not the least softening impression upon their hearts, which are hardened and wedded to their lusts.

5thly, There is in all men by nature an impotency to believe. "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him;" *i. e.* 'No man can, by any power or ability of his own, believe on me.' By reason of the fall, we are in worse case for religion than anything else. The natural man may make essays towards several duties, as praying, reading, hearing, communicating; but as for the great duty of believing on the Son of God, he can just do nothing at all; and therefore it is no wonder that unbelief prevails so much in the world. However, this impotency to believe and to do good, is our sin, as well as our misery; it is criminal before God, for he made man upright.

III. I go on, in the next place, to lay down some propositions concerning unbelief, which may further discover its heinous nature and hurtful tendency. And, 1st, Unbelief is a sin of a very old date. It does, if I may so speak, claim the pre-eminence among other sins, in regard of its antiquity, for it seems to have been the first sin of our first parents. The temptation was offered to faith. "Yea, hath God said" (says the devil). At this Eve staggered: she became dizzy; and upon that arm she fell and broke it to pieces. The temptation expressly contradicts the divine threatening. God had said, that in the day they ate the forbidden fruit, they should surely die. Satan says, Ye shall not die: and so that kind of unbelief, which has the divine threatenings for its object, and is commonly called presumption, is likewise of an ancient date, and derives its origin from the father of lies.

Thus unbelief early entered the world, and the world was shut up under it. Other sins are the causes for which God imprisons men, but that they are held fast he makes unbelief the jailer.

2dly, Unbelief is a sin productive of all other sins. It is like the fountain, and all other sins are the streams. While others slay their thousands, it slays its ten thou-

sands. It kills shoals of Adam's children, and lays them in heaps upon heaps, as Samson did the Philistines. It fills the church and the world with all sorts of sinners; and it crowds the pit with sinners that shall never be released. As faith is the fountain of all holy obedience; so unbelief is the fountain of all disobedience. The pride, the rebellion, and murmurings of Israel in the wilderness, flowed all from unbelief, as the apostle teaches, Heb. chap. iii.; and the more or less of unbelief that is in any of the just, so much the more or less shall their disobedience be. It is the different degrees and workings of unbelief that make some openly profane, some hypocrites or formalists, some mere moralists, and others apostates.

Thus, whatever be the denomination of sinners living under the gospel, the denomination of unbelievers agrees to them all; for, though the profane person cannot be called a moralist, nor the mere moralist called a profane person, yet each of them may be called an unbeliever. Unbelief is the spring of all turnings aside, either to the right or left hand: therefore, in all your searchings and self-examinations, be sure not to forget or overlook unbelief, else you will do nothing at all. If it be undiscovered and undisturbed in the heart, though you could purge yourselves of all other sins, yet it would presently make your hearts like a cage of unclean birds; it would fill it with all manner of abominations.

But to illustrate this a little further, I will condescend on some particular sins, which flow directly and immediately from unbelief as their fountain.

1st, The great, the heinous sin of rejecting Jesus Christ offered in the gospel, flows from unbelief. Thus the prophet Isaiah, when complaining of the unsuccessfulness of the means of grace in his days, resolves it into unbelief as the cause of it, Isa. liii. 1; and the apostle Paul, Heb. iv. 2. tells the Hebrews, that the gospel was preached unto their fathers, as well as unto them, but did not profit them; and he assigns the very same reason for it with the prophet Isaiah, viz. their unbelief: "The word not being mixed

with faith in them that heard it." Wherefore did the Jews reject the Messiah when he came to them? how was it that they regarded neither his doctrine, nor his divine mission, notwithstanding the indisputable evidences he gave of the truth of both? Why, all this proceeded from an absolutely prevailing principle of unbelief in their hearts. Yea, we find, Matt. xiii., that when our Lord came to his own countrymen, and spoke and did works among them as never man did, their unbelief came to such a height, that there was a kind of embargo laid upon him; and he was in a manner discouraged from doing any mighty works among them; verse ult. "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." He did some mighty works; but their unbelief flew so full in the face of them, that he saw it needless to do any more such works. Whence proceeds the deism of the age, the rejecting revealed religion, and resting upon the light of nature? Why, it is all owing to the prevalence of unbelief. Whence is it that the greatest part of the hearers of the gospel, though they do not openly reject it, yet they never cordially receive it,—they never concern themselves about it more than they never had heard such things? Why, all proceeds from the same fountain, ever reigning unbelief. Now, my brethren, the not receiving or rejecting Jesus Christ offered in the gospel, is the most heinous of sins: there is nothing so provoking to God: and he has testified his displeasure against it, by inflicting the most terrible judgments upon those who are guilty of it: the Jews are witnesses hereof to this very day. Now, if rejecting the gospel be such a great sin, what shall we think of unbelief, which is the undoubted parent of it?

2dly, Presumption is one of the wicked progeny of unbelief. I observed before, that the devil, in seducing the innocent pair in paradise, expressly contradicted the divine threatening of death, and made them to presume upon it, as if there had been nothing in it. Whence is it that sinners presume upon the general mercy of God, saying, they shall have peace, though they walk according to the ima-

ginations of their own hearts? whence is it that they presume upon his patience: that, because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore they believe that it will never be executed? why, all this abominable presumption proceeds from their unbelief of his justice and holiness, by which he cannot but hate and revenge sin upon the impenitent; and likewise from unbelief of that special mercy in Christ, by which alone it is that he can pardon sinners.

3dly, Despair is likewise the native product of unbelief. Cain, Saul, and Judas, and many others, through the prevalency of unbelief, have been driven to despair. Any faith or belief that such persons have, is absolutely and immoveably fixed upon the justice of God, and the terrible threatenings of the law; and that, in the eye of heaven, is rank unbelief; and the issue of it, which is the mercy of God, proves it to be so. Now, despair is a dreadful sin, for it is levelled against the free grace of God, which is the remedy of all sin. What, then, shall we think of unbelief from which it flows?

4thly, Apostacy from the profession of the gospel is one of the bitter fruits of unbelief. This the apostle tells us plainly. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," Heb. iii. 12. As unbelief prevails with some absolutely to refuse a compliance with the gospel, so it prevails with others to reject it, after it has been received and professed, which is a most heinous sin. Apostates and backsliders are the abhorred of the Lord, therefore take heed unto yourselves; for though you have made, and continue to make profession of the gospel, yet if there be an absolutely prevailing principle of unbelief in your hearts, it will work you up at last into a forsaking of that profession.

5thly, Murmuring under cross events of providence, flows likewise from the prevalence of unbelief. The conduct of the Israelites in the wilderness, is a plain proof of the power of unbelief upon the heart, to make it fret at the divine dealings. They were never reduced to any

straits, but they fell a-murmuring against God, and his servant Moses: they moved doubts and jealousies about the power of God, saying, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?" Psal. lxxviii. 19, 20. "Take heed, then, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief:" for if unbelief has the ascendant in the soul, and be allowed to judge concerning the conduct of providence, it will give in a verdict to the dishonour of God, and to the discouragement of the Christian. It is no wonder indeed, that those in whom unbelief absolutely prevails, should be quite dissatisfied with every part of the divine conduct: for we find the saints themselves, under the prevalence of remaining unbelief, scarce able to bear some parts of the divine conduct towards them. Jacob says, "All these things are against me;" and David in his haste said, "That all men are liars." Samuel, Gad, and Nathan, the prophets of the Lord, not excepted. The remains of unbelief threw so much mist, dust, and darkness upon their minds, that they could not see the kindness and good-will of God towards them in his dispensations.

3. Unbelief is a common sin, and therefore the less regarded among men, but nothing the less provoking to God. It was the common sin among the Jews, but they did not regard it; they would not be convinced of it; but the universality of it was an aggravation in God's sight, as appeared from the event, when the whole nation was involved in the same punishment, even as they had involved themselves in the same guilt. A disease ceases not to be mortal, because it is epidemic; nay, it is the more dangerous. Unbelief, then, is a great sin, and it is so much the greater that multitudes are involved in the guilt of it. It is the great prevailing sin among the hearers of the gospel at this day: they believe not the report; they refuse to credit his word of grace. Some of them are guilty of very heinous sins; sins that give great scandal and offence, and sometimes they are prevailed upon to think of them: but as for the sin of unbelief, in which they have

lived, and which has lived and lodged in them all their days, and which is the fountain of all their other sins, they never notice it, notwithstanding all they hear concerning the heinous nature and hurtful tendency of it. My brethren, there is utterly a fault in you in this matter. You have not your senses rightly exercised to discern betwixt good and evil, else you would not think so lightly of unbelief. And let me tell you, that, think as slightly of unbelief as you will, the Judge of all the earth thinks otherwise of it; and, as an evidence thereof, he has said, that "he who believeth not shall be damned;" and when he comes in flaming fire at the latter day, it is to take vengeance on unbelievers.

4. Unbelief is a sin which casts the greatest dishonour upon God. The unbelieving man or woman charges the Most High with falsehood, and makes the God of truth a liar, 1 John v. 10. God has given his record concerning his Son, which is a most certain truth, and is therefore proposed unto faith; and when we refuse to give faith to it, we call it a lie, and so fix falsehood upon the recorder. Nay, my brethren, the nature and tendency of unbelief is to make void the scheme of salvation, and to frustrate the whole counsel of God in that matter; for the gospel, which is the alone mean of salvation, is, in the depths of sovereign wisdom, so contrived, that without faith applying it to the soul, God can neither get the glory he proposes by it, nor can the sinner get any good by it. Indeed, if the case were thus, that the merits of Christ, or the preaching of the gospel should save, though we never believed, never improved it, or walked any way answerable to it, then truly unbelief would not be such a terrible thing as we represent it. But the matter is by no means thus. According to the present state of things, there is such a close connection betwixt faith and the glory of God, betwixt faith and the salvation of the sinner, that unbelief, which is directly opposite unto faith, must be that sin, which, above all others, robs God of his whole revenue of glory, and robs the sinner of all his salvation.

5. Unbelief is one of the sins which God punishes with the most awful judgments. The church of the Jews, before and after our Saviour, is a pregnant proof hereof. The generation in the wilderness were, for their unbelief, absolutely excluded from entering into the promised land. God entered a caveat against them, with no less solemnity than that of an oath. They were doomed to pass a miserable and inglorious life for forty years in the wilderness, and then their carcasses were to fall to dung it. And as for that generation which filled up the measure of their fathers, in rejecting the Messiah, you know what was their fate. Our Lord told them of it, and it came to pass not long after his ascension. Their whole polity, civil and ecclesiastical, was overturned; their city was besieged; their temple destroyed, insomuch that one stone of it was not left upon another; and all this because of their unbelief. Therefore I say to you, as in Rom. xi. 20, "Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear."

6. Unbelief is that sin, which, above all others, excludes multitudes of the hearers of the gospel from the rest promised therein. Mark xvi. 16, "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." As faith is the precise point upon which our salvation turns, so unbelief is the precise point upon which our condemnation turns.

Moreover, when the Lord comes in flaming fire, he is to take vengeance upon them that obey not the gospel. Now, what is the obedience that the gospel requires? Why, it is the obedience of faith; it is believing. This is the only obedience which the gospel requires; and those who refuse to obey it are unbelievers; and as such, God will judge and condemn them at the last day.

It is a sin against the remedy of all sins. And what is this remedy? It is the blood of Christ, or free grace. Unbelief is levelled directly against them; so that the unbeliever cannot, or rather will not be saved. Yea, whence is it that the sin against the Holy Ghost is said to be un-

pardonable? is it from any defect in the blood of Christ? is it because there is not enough of grace and mercy in God to pardon such a heinous sin? By no means. It flows from the unbelief and impiety of those that are guilty of this sin. There is no sin so great, but God will pardon it, upon the sinner's believing in Christ and turning from it; but the nature of this sin is such, that the sinner, wilfully, deliberately, and maliciously rejects Christ and all the salvation purchased by him. So that the unpardonableness of this sin is absolutely owing to the sinner, and not to the God of all grace.

7. Unbelief is the great disturber of the saints' peace and comfort while they are in this world. Saints, though they have not evil hearts of unbelief, yet they have unbelief in their hearts in a greater or lesser degree; and this is the procuring cause of all their wilderness provocations, and consequently the procuring cause of all their wilderness tribulations. I know not indeed but that God may sometimes afflict his people out of mere sovereignty; and I think there is something like it in Job's case. Observe what the Lord says of him to Satan:—"Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in all the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause." Howbeit, if there be such a thing as God's afflicting his people out of mere sovereignty, it happens very seldom; for he "does not afflict willingly." There is generally some particular transgression for which he contends with them; and that particular transgression is either unbelief itself, or some of its fruits. Nay, were it not for unbelief, the saints might have a very heaven here upon earth. But unbelief, though it cannot break the peace, (for he that made it maintains it,) yet it frequently darkens the evidence of it; and this throws them into great distress. It is the prevalence of unbelief that makes them frequently cry out, "Has he forgotten to be gracious? is his mercy clean gone? does his promise fail for

evermore?" It is unbelief that fills them with jealousies against God, as if in some dispensations he designed their ruin, when he really aims at their good. "All these things are against me," says Jacob. "All men are liars," says David. Thus you see it is a great enemy to the saints. No wonder that they complain heavily of their unbelieving hearts, for they are the source of much sin and much sorrow.

8. Unbelief is such a sin that the oath of God is engaged against it. He speaks against other sins in severe threatenings; but the oath of God is engaged against no sin but unbelief, Heb. iii. 18. The murmurings and rebellions of Israel in the wilderness were very provoking sins; but that which gave them such a height of provocation, that God entered a caveat against them with no less solemnity than that of an oath, was their relation to unbelief.

Thus, my brethren, if you continue in unbelief, you shall be as really excluded from the heavenly Canaan, as the murmuring Israelites were from the earthly Canaan. It shall not be in your power to enter into it; for the oath of God stands as a bar in your way.

9. I observe, that for as horrid a notion as we generally have of atheism, it is but unbelief in its highest degree. An atheist is one who does not believe a God, a providence, and a future state: and is not such an one an unbeliever? so that a common and ordinary unbeliever among the hearers of the gospel, is a sinner of the same kind with a professed atheist. He has the same principle of sin in him; and were it not for the divine restraint, that principle would be winded up to the height of atheism.

As people do not become vicious in their practice all of a sudden, so neither do any become immediately debauched in their principles. They proceed from lesser to greater: they inure themselves to a disbelief of the promises of the gospel; then they disbelieve the threatenings of the law against sin, and this necessarily leads them to a disbelief of the Lawgiver, and then they commence atheists: they say, at least they wish in their hearts there were no God.

SERMON XII.

THE NATURE OF UNBELIEF OPENED UP, AND ITS PER-
NICIOUS INFLUENCE UPON PROFESSORS OF THE GOS-
PEL ILLUSTRATED.

HEB. iii. 12.—“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

[Second Sermon on this Text.]

THE method proposed was, in the first place, I. To mention some things plainly implied in the text and doctrine. II. To open the nature of unbelief, and show you wherein it consists. III. To lay down some propositions regarding unbelief, which may further discover its heinous nature and hurtful tendency. IV. To inquire into that influence which unbelief has upon some professors, to make them apostates from their profession, and so depart from the living God; and, Lastly, To apply.

The three first of these heads have been fully considered already. I now proceed, in the fourth place,

IV. To inquire into the influence which unbelief has upon some professors, to make them apostates from their profession, and so depart from the living God.

1. Let it be observed concerning such professors, that unbelief, having always been the prevailing principle in their hearts, they never had the root of the matter in them.

They never had anything of Christianity, but what might be lost as easily as it was obtained. They never went far-

ther in it, that what might well enough consist with an absolutely prevailing principle of unbelief. As for the life of Christianity, those who have attained unto it, can never fall from it totally or finally; for unbelief, as to its absolute prevalency, is subdued in them, and a contrary principle is planted in their souls, 1 John iii. 9. But as for an outward profession of Christianity, which people maintain by a form of godliness, they may fall from it; yea, they cannot well continue long in it, while unbelief absolutely prevails in their hearts; for that principle is always upon the growing hand; it is rising higher and higher, until it come to such a height, that the person throws off the very profession of Christianity.

2. Unbelief prevailing in the heart, gives the loose, as it were, to all other corrupt lusts and affections that are there. Unbelief has the throne in their hearts: there it sits as king: all the other lusts are its servants, which it commands to go or come as it pleases. Hence, though other sins, as love of this present world, or love to carnal ease, may be the proximate and immediate causes of apostacy, yet it is unbelief that engenders these sins in the heart, and strengthens them to such a degree, that they throw off that profession of religion which is like to be dangerous to them. Demas forsook Paul, for the love of this present world. But had Demas had a principle of faith in him, it would have subdued his love of this present world, and would have made him look for a better and more enduring inheritance in the heavens. But instead of that, he had a reigning principle of unbelief, which gave the loose to those and all his other lusts, that were like to be starved, if he had continued in the profession of Christianity.

3. Unbelief casts all noble and generous principles out of the heart. It dispirits a man, and makes him a downright coward, so that he dare not go forward in the way of religion, but draws back. Hence, in Rev. xxi. 8, the fearful and unbelieving are ranked together, as being near akin: fear is the child, and unbelief is the parent. The

fearful are those who, having entered upon the way of religion, are so scared at the difficulties and hardships casting up in it, that they dare not go forward. They think it impossible for them ever to get safe to the end of the way; and so they judge it best to draw back in time.

We may judge of the nature and effects of unbelief, by comparing it with its opposite grace, which is faith. Now faith, you know, is the most bold and courageous of all the graces. It makes a man like another Samson, both for strength and courage. The saints of old, through faith, "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." But unbelief is a base coward: it makes a man to run when none pursues him; to fear, where there is no cause of fear. Faith removes the mountain, but unbelief raises it; yea, it imagines that to be a mountain which is but a molehill. Unbelief says there is a lion in the streets, and therefore it is not safe to go out; but faith ventures out upon the word of promise: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder." Unbelief makes such a report of the good land to the man, as intimidates and frightens him. It tells him of such rocks and mountains, of such lions and leopards in the way, as drives him back after he designed to set forward. But when unbelief whispers any such reports in the saints' ears to discourage them, valiant faith steps in, like Caleb of old, and stills them, saying, "Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it," Numb. xiii. 30.

4. Unbelief centres the soul upon earthly things, and thereby influences it unto an apostacy from Christianity, when the profession of it is any way incompatible with these things. As faith raises the soul above earthly things, and opens it a passage unto the holiest of all, where it sees a portion suitable to its nature, and so bears it up under all the worldly crosses, losses, and discouragements that may attend the profession of Christianity; so, on the other

hand, unbelief confines the soul to earthly things as its portion. It cannot look upwards to God in Christ. It cannot carry the soul within the veil. The unbeliever's treasure lies in the earth, and therefore, when his profession of Christianity interferes with it, no wonder that he throws it off.

Having finished the doctrinal part of this subject, I now proceed to the application.

First, then, this doctrine may be improved by way of lamentation over an unbelieving world, unto whom the gospel is preached. Alas! "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The word is preached, the word is heard; but it is not mixed with faith in them that hear, and therefore it cannot profit them. The gospel is the same now that it was in ancient times; but the temper and disposition of the hearers are not what they have been. An indifference and lukewarmness have seized the spirits of the most part of our professors. The good old doctrine of the cross of Christ, the doctrine preached by the apostles, the doctrine preached by our reformers, is now become so old, that with many it is quite out of date, and it has no savour with them. They have itching ears, are fond of new speculations and fancies; they seek amusement, but not edification; and so the simple, plain, and undisguised preaching of the gospel is foolishness with them.

Nay, infidelity and atheism prevail so much, that bold attempts are made to sap and undermine the foundations of revealed religion. The doctrine of the cross seems to the worshippers of reason, a "cunningly devised fable," and an imposition upon the world. To others, it is a lovely song, which, though it make some impression, yet that impression presently wears off, and they are nothing the better for it. Vice and immorality, the native product of unbelief, overflows all its banks. The greatest part believe neither the promises of the gospel, nor the threatenings of the law; therefore they go on, Jehu-like, in spite of all ordinances, and in spite of the most awful dispensations of

Providence, whereof there are not a few at this day. This is the case of the present generation, and it is their unbelief that makes it so.

And what is most to be lamented is, that though unbelief be the crying sin among the hearers of the gospel at this day, yet they will not be convinced of it. People will not see it to be a sin, at least to be such a heinous sin, as the Spirit of God in the Scripture represents it. Yea, it is much to be doubted, if any among you have been prevailed on to look into your own hearts, for the abominable idol, notwithstanding all you have heard about it. However, if any of you be destroyed by it, it is not for want of warning.

Secondly, This doctrine may be improved by way of caution, trial, and examination. 1st, You who are professors, I would have you take the watch-word in the text: "Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." You may go the round of religious duties,—you may pray in secret, and in your families,—you may read, hear, and sit down at the Lord's table,—and yet there may be a dead fly which will cause all this ointment of yours to send forth a stinking savour;—I mean, the evil heart of unbelief,—that will spoil, that will putrefy all your duties, so that God will not be able to bear them. Neither think that your long standing in a profession is a sufficient evidence that you have not an evil heart of unbelief; for unbelief being lodged in the heart, may be concealed in it for a long time, and may be working very powerfully though you perceive it not. 2dly, Real believers, you are also concerned in this matter; for, though you have not an evil heart of unbelief, yet there is much unbelief in your hearts. None of you believes so strongly, so steadily, and constantly as you should do. If you think you do, it is a plain symptom that you have no faith at all. Those who complain most of their unbelieving hearts, are the best believers. That man understood the nature of faith, and had a great deal of it, who said, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Wherefore, believers, I caution you against unbelief. Beware of the very first motions of it. Listen not to this whisperer, lest he separate betwixt you and your best friend. It is a sin of the most malignant influence of any whatsoever; therefore the least degree of it is dangerous.

Quest. But how shall we distinguish betwixt unbelief in the heart, and an evil heart of unbelief? This question I would solve for the sake of real believers, for they are the only persons who inquire into these matters; and when they feel unbelief working in their hearts, they are apt to suspect that they are utterly destitute of saving faith, and that they have an evil heart of unbelief.

1. In the general, let it be observed, that there is unbelief in the heart of the strongest and steadiest believers, so long as they are in the world. But the evil heart of unbelief subsists only in such as never yet believed unto the saving of their souls. We must distinguish betwixt doing a thing in unbelief, and doing it not without a mixture of unbelief. It is one of the adorable depths of the divine wisdom, that the sanctification of believers is not perfected until death. Hence, though they be sanctified in every part, soul, body, and spirit, yet they are completely sanctified in no part. They are split into flesh and spirit—into an old man and a new man: there is a piece of remaining corruption to oppose every grace of the Spirit. Hence there is a remainder of unbelief to oppose the actings of faith; there is a remainder of hypocrisy to oppose the grace of sincerity; so that the strongest believer must cry, with the man in the gospel, for help against his unbelief, and with the apostles, Luke xvii. 5. “Lord, Increase our faith.” But the question still returns, viz. How shall I know whether the unbelief in my heart be the absolutely prevailing principle there, or only such a remainder of it as is consistent with a gracious state thereafter.

2. When unbelief absolutely prevails in the heart, the person has no sense or feeling of it; whereas a gracious person feels the workings of unbelief in his heart, com-

plains of them, and mourns over them before the Lord. It is indeed possible that hypocrites, when they take a religious fit, and have their affections moved, may complain of unbelief as if they really felt it. But sure I am, a solid and abiding sense and feeling of the workings of unbelief will be found in none in whom it absolutely prevails; for this feeling is the very fruit of faith, and cannot be where there is no faith, no more than smoke can be where there is no fire, or motion where there is no life.

3. Where unbelief absolutely prevails in the heart, it meets with no opposition; whereas the man who has a principle of faith, constantly opposes, struggles, and fights against the remainder of unbelief in his heart. Hence the apostle says, "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other," Gal. v. 17. Abraham was so great a believer, that he was honoured with the title of the father of the faithful: his faith was made the pattern of the faith of the church in all ages; yet in the promise of a son to him he struggled with unbelief; for it is said, that "against hope he believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations." His unbelief flew in the face of the promise, and produced very strong reasonings against the completion of it, viz. his own advanced years, and the deadness of Sarah's womb. But his faith not only opposed but overcame the reasonings of unbelief; and the victory of faith was so much the more glorious, that it was over such a powerful antagonist as unbelief, Rom. iv. 18, 19, 20. Therefore, my brethren, if there be a principle in your souls that struggles and fights against the workings of unbelief, and that not by fits and starts, but habitually and constantly, it is no other than a principle of faith, and consequently unbelief does not absolutely prevail over you. Do not you sometimes feel unbelief rising against the promises of God, and against the providence of God; and, in that case, are you exercised as Abraham was, hoping against hope, and believing over the belly of unbelief, crying to the Lord that he would help your unbelief, and increase

your faith: are you saying with Job, "Though he should slay me, yet will I trust in him?" That man, you see, resolves to fight against unbelief to the very last drop of his blood; as if he had said, The Lord's hand is very sore out against me, and unbelief triumphs over me, saying, where is his mercy, where is his promise? The dispensations of his providence are a downright contradiction to it, but I will not yield it; I will hang by my God; yea, though he should put forth his hand and slay me outright, yet will I die in the faith of his promise.

4. When unbelief absolutely prevails in the heart, there is no abiding love to Jesus Christ in it: whereas, when a man has a principle of faith, it worketh by love, both to the Head and to the members, notwithstanding the remains of unbelief. Peter was a believer in Christ, and consequently a lover of Christ; and though unbelief did not prevail absolutely over him, so as to expel his faith and love totally, yet it prevailed very far, and would have prevailed to the last degree, had it not been Christ's prayer on his behalf, that his faith might not fail, Luke xxii. 31, 32. Now, this man's denial of his Master did not flow from his want of faith in him as the Messiah; it flowed not from a hatred of him, nor yet from an absolute want of love to him; but it flowed from the weakness of his faith and love, and the strength of his remaining unbelief. His faith and love were habitually stronger than his unbelief; but in that hour of temptation unbelief had the ascendant; yet it did not keep its place long; for Christ, by looking to him, looked his unbelief out of countenance: and as for the sincerity of his love, he appeals to the Searcher of hearts: "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."

Examine yourselves, then, my brethren, in this matter. If you feel in your hearts an abiding principle of love to Christ, whereby you esteem him, desire him, and delight in him above all things, you may be satisfied, that unbelief does not absolutely prevail in you, but that you have the faith of God's elect.

5. When unbelief absolutely prevails in the heart, the man's heart is altogether impure, and the man's conversation is disorderly, and not as becometh the gospel; whereas, when a man has a principle of faith, it purifies his heart, and regulates his life according to the laws of Christ. What faith applies for this end is the blood of Christ, and it is always effectual; for "the blood of his Son Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Now, a pure heart is the only foundation of a pure and undefiled walk; it is only those that are thus purified that are capable of it. Hence the charge, to maintain good works, is laid upon those who have believed in God, Tit. iii. 8. It is true, indeed, the believer's walk is not without blemishes; he sometimes stumbles and falls deep into the mire, as Peter did; but then he does not lie still there; nay, he rises up again, and runs to the fountain for cleansing. Neither is this stumbling habitual and customary to him: it is occasioned at times by the force of temptation from Satan and the world without, or the remains of unbelief within. He is not himself, when he makes these stumbles.

But, as to others, there is in them unbelief absolutely prevailing; their hearts are altogether loathsome and defiled; they are crammed full of unmortified lusts, which, like soldiers from hell, quarter upon them, and are all going over other. There is no contrary principle brought in either to quell them or expel them, and so they just do as they please; even as when there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes. Now, this impure and disorderly heart cannot fail to produce an impure and disorderly walk. He in whom unbelief absolutely prevails, can never be a habitually tender walker. He may indeed have a form of godliness: he may do some good works; I mean, good as to the matter of them, being commanded of God. He may likewise abstain from gross sins; but the habitual temper of his soul, and tenor of his life, can never be as becomes the gospel. Try yourselves by this mark. The tree is known by its fruit. If you be real believers, your faith will purify your life as

well as your hearts. You will be diligent, constant, and universal in your endeavours after holiness.

6. Though people may hold on in a profession for a time, while unbelief absolutely prevails in their hearts, yet, in a day of trial, this bitter root will discover itself; whereas those who have the faith of God's operation, hold fast their profession to the end, whatever their trials be. Christ records it to the honour of the church of Smyrna, that she held fast his name, and had not denied his faith, even in those days wherein Antipas his faithful martyr was slain among them, Rev. ii. 13. Their faith had stood the trial of the fire of persecution; and it was not found reprobate silver, but declared to be genuine. But where unbelief absolutely prevails, it dispirits a man for trials, makes him faint and draw back in the day of adversity. Like the sons of Ephraim, who, though they were armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle, Psal. lxxviii. 9.

Quest. But what shall we say, when unbelief prevails so far, as to make a person not only doubt of the promises of God, but to call in question the very fundamental principles of religion, as the being and attributes of God, and the truth and authority of the Scriptures? Can unbelief so far prevail against a real believer? I answer, Yea, it may. We have heard of gracious persons thus exercised. Unbelief has set so strongly against them, that they have been like to raze the very foundations. Did not unbelief prevail to such a degree over the Psalmist, that he was almost turned atheist. The words of his unbelief were: "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning," Psal. lxxiii. 13, 14. Yet this man was a great believer, as appears from the issue of the temptation. Hence I say, 1st, That when unbelief prevails thus far over a believer, his faith is not thereby expelled; it is only kept under, and its activity is restrained. It is in that case like a spark of fire buried under ashes, so that it does not send forth either heat or

light, but still is alive, and when the ashes are scattered it appears. So, when this mist, smoke, and ashes of unbelief are scattered by the blowings of the Spirit, the principle of faith appears like the sun from under a cloud. 2dly, I say, that oftentimes they are believers not of a middle stature, but of the first rank, whom the Lord thus exercises. Such strong assaults of unbelief, are so far from being inconsistent with the state of a believer, that they are generally made upon the strongest believers. Pirates generally seize upon the ships that are most richly laden. The more faith that a man has, the greater eyesore is he to Satan; and he will be sure to employ all his power, and all his policy, against him. Besides, whom the Lord designs for great service and great sufferings, he prepares them for the same, by sore conflicts with Satan and the unbelieving heart. Witness the apostle Paul. 3dly, I say, Those sore assaults of unbelief are, in the end, turned to the believer's good and advantage. The trees of God's Eden take the deeper root after such sore shakings. When Asaph went to the sanctuary of God, he got clearer views of God's providence, with respect to the wicked, than ever he had before: "Then did I see their end; surely thou didst set them in slippery places," &c. And this faith and confidence in God as his God, became more firm and steadfast than ever it did before. It is really surprising to see the difference betwixt his frame of spirit in the 10th and 14th verses, and in the 23d, 24th, and 25th verses of the chapter. In the former, he is in the very heat of the battle with unbelief, and he fairly gets the fall, which makes him cry out that religion is a vain thing: but when we come down to the 23d verse, we find him get to his feet again; and behold, he is speaking not only like one that had faith, but like one that had the assurance of faith: "Nevertheless I am continually with thee," &c. Strange! is this the man who a little before was calling religion a vain thing? Surely his fall has made him to stand the more firm: his shaking has rooted him: the furnace has purged him, and his faith is come forth pure as gold.

And now let me apply this doctrine by way of exhortation. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief."

1. Consider, that unbelief is a clandestine enemy, that may hide itself not only in your house, but in your heart, while you are not aware. This enemy may be living in you, and working in you, when you know it not. "Therefore take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." "Examine your own selves; prove your own selves, whether you be in the faith."

2. "Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief;" for it will turn all that you do into sin, and so spoil the acceptance both of your persons and performances. "Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin;" and "without faith it is impossible to please God." Unbelief will turn your prayers and praises, your reading, your hearing and communicating, all into sin. It will make them all an abomination unto the Lord. The proud hypocrite and self-justifying person never performs a duty, but he presently marks God his debtor for it: not remembering, that for every one of these duties God marks him a debtor to his law, to his justice, to his wrath, and all because they are done in unbelief.

3. Take heed of the evil heart of unbelief; for it separates betwixt Christ and you. It stands betwixt you and him; and so long as it prevails absolutely, you the sinner, and he the Saviour, will never meet. Therefore, as you regard your souls, beware of unbelief. For though you may be saved from your unbelief, yet you will never be saved in your unbelief.

4. The solemn ordinance now near in view, calls you to take the caution in the text. Communicants, "Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." If unbelief absolutely prevail in your hearts, you are enemies to Christ, and so have nothing to do with that feast which he has prepared for his friends. You can never expect the Master's welcome; you can never expect comfort or establishment to your souls by this ordinance, if

you are yet in unbelief. Nay, you will "eat and drink judgment to yourselves."

By way of Direction.

1. Be convinced of the greatness of the sin of unbelief. Look upon it as that sin which, above all others, is most dishonouring to God, and hurtful to your own souls; for it is the ruin of the hearers of the gospel, that they do not believe unbelief to be a sin, at least such a heinous one as we have represented it.

2. Be much in self-examination. Go down to the chambers of your hearts, and ransack every corner of them for unbelief; and when you have examined yourselves with all the strictness you are capable of, beg God that he would search and try you, that he would find out this action of unbelief in your hearts, and stone it out before your eyes.

3. Be much in prayer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would help your unbelief, and increase your frequent application to the throne of grace, as a most excellent antidote against unbelief:

4. Resolutely credit the promise of the gospel. Believe, that since he has called you to come unto him, he is willing to save you, and will save if you come unto him. If Satan and the unbelieving heart say, thou hast so sinned, and shalt thou be saved? Your answer is native and true. I have so sinned: but "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

5. Lay this down for a conclusion; that all the dispensations of providence work towards the accomplishment of the promise. Unbelief is a constant carper at the providence of God: it urges it as a bar set in the way of the promise. But do you silence these malignant whisperers of unbelief, by "holding the beginning of your confidence stedfast unto the end."

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BY THE

REV. JAMES B A I N E, M.A.

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SERMON I.

THE PASTORAL OFFICE, AND DUTIES OF IT, BRIEFLY DELINEATED.¹

MAL. ii. 6.—“The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.”

AMONGST other advantages from meetings of this kind, it is not inconsiderable, that they are generally opened with sermons which have a relation, less or more, to the ministerial work. And, indeed, considering how important and comprehensive it is, the purest minds may need, now and then, to be stirred up to the remembrance of it: I say to the remembrance of it; for it is not so much meant, I presume, by discourses of this kind, to teach others what they are ignorant of, as to have our own hearts more deeply impressed with reviewing what we already know. Now, it is the laudable custom, or rather the reason on which it is founded, that authorizes me to make any such attempt. And, when I do so, I hope my reverend fathers and brethren “will bear with me a little; and indeed bear with me.”

These words lie in a context where the enormities of the priests are reproved, and threatened with awful severities. The external sanctity of their order did not alleviate, far less atone for their offences, but made them more highly criminal. It is true, amidst all the anathemas here denounced, there is a merciful hint that repentance might

¹ Preached at the opening of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, at Ayr the 2d of April, 1745.

prevent their ruin. And, to bring them to the amendment wished for, they have set before them a character perfect in its kind; the character of some who had preceded them in the sacred office, and having acquitted themselves with fidelity, and to the divine approbation, have this testimony in the verse now read, "The law of truth was in his mouth," &c.

The whole of these words are spoken directly of the Jewish priesthood; but, the essential qualities necessary to both being the same, they may, without the least violence, be applied to the Christian ministry. And in this light I would now consider them; and that in all the branches of the text.

I. Their doctrine, and manner of publishing it: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips."

II. The nature of their conversation and life: "He walked with me in peace and equity," says God.

III. The happy tendency and fruit of both: "And did turn many away from iniquity."

Lastly, I shall conclude with some reflections upon the whole.

I. The *first* part, then, of the text and character, is, "The law of truth was in his mouth;" meaning, no doubt, the Old Testament revelation, the whole of God's mind and will contained there. This the priests were bound to explain, and propagate the knowledge of among his people. In like manner, it is true of the authorized teachers of Christianity, that the "law of truth" ought to be in their mouth; and the expression seems to import two things.

1. The purity and soundness of the doctrines which we preach. These are to be the true and faithful sayings, the lively oracles of God, not the visions of our own head, or the inventions of men. "I delivered to you," says the apostle Paul, "that which I received of the Lord;" and in this he acted agreeably to the commission given to them all—"Teaching them to observe all things," saith Christ, "whatsoever I have commanded you." It is of great im-

portance thoroughly to know the contents and tenor of our commission; the nature and importance, dependence and connection of divine truths contained in it; and, as wise builders, we would lay the foundation in these first principles, which are unchangeably the same under the Old Testament and New. Thus, in bringing men to God, we would convince them that he is; prove his existence and attributes, and explain them with as much perspicuity as possible; his government of this world, and the just retribution we may expect from him in the next; the worth and immortality of the soul, and the everlasting obligations of moral goodness. We would establish our hearers in the faith of revelation, letting them see the grounds upon which its credibility is built. In a special manner, we ought to explain the Scripture account, and indeed the most satisfying one, of the origin of moral evil; the darkness and disorder it has brought upon human nature; its extensive influence over all of our race. We would paint this destroyer in its different and hideous aspects; as unjust rebellion against the laws, and cursed enmity to the holiness of God; as the crucifier of the Lord of glory, and grief of his Holy Spirit; as the sickness, dishonour, and death of the precious soul. And having explained the guilt, condemnation, and death that came upon us by the first Adam; it would be criminal to be silent upon the gift of righteousness, the abundance of grace, and the eternal life which reigns through Jesus Christ, who is the second Adam, and the Lord from heaven. "This is the faithful saying, that he came to save sinners," which should frequently be in our lips, the principal part of our commission, as ministers of his gospel, to open up his amiable character and offices, to pour forth his name as ointment, and to make manifest in every place the sweet savour of the knowledge of it. This was the manner of the great apostle, Eph. iii. 8: "That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;" the treasures of his love, and fellowship of his sufferings; the power of his resurrection, and beauties of his holiness; the ease and

honour of his yoke, and joys of his salvation. Thus, like the star to the wise men, so should the light of our sermons, and other public ministrations, guide souls to Christ ; to him, I say, as their wise Teacher to instruct, and High-priest to reconcile ; as an exalted Prince, to whom the love and obedience of the whole man is due ; and Advocate, to present them and their services to God. In a word, to Him as the inexhaustible fountain of pardon and grace, comfort, victory, and glory.

2. This expression, "the law of truth is in his mouth," imports not only the soundness and purity of our doctrine, but a promptness and ability to deliver it. This is, in Scripture style, "the door of utterance," so frequently prayed for by the apostle. And therefore, among other qualifications of a gospel minister, we find that usually this is one, that "he be apt to teach;" not only have a heart well-affected to the truth, but a readiness and talent for imparting it to others. This is of so much importance, that it was particularly promised, and given by our Lord to the first planters of his gospel, "a mouth as well as wisdom, which all their enemies should not be able to gainsay." In the infancy of the church it was an extraordinary gift, now it is to be acquired. A variety of means is necessary to this purpose, which cannot be here enlarged upon ; viz. Acquaintance with the languages, in some degree at least, and the different parts of philosophy ; the attentive study of human nature, and knowledge of its history in the different ages of the world ; but above all, the knowledge of the sacred records, with devout meditation and prayer. By these, and such like means, should we furnish the mind with an abundance of valuable truths, and cultivate them with future care, that out of this treasure the mouth may speak, and bring forth things new and old. Now, all these helps are necessary in their place ; and to decry the use of any one of them, particularly of human learning, were quite barbarous and Gothic. It is an encomium upon Moses, and a shining part of his character, that "he was learned in all the wisdom of the

Egyptians;" and of Apollos, that "he was an eloquent man," Acts xviii. 24; yet what immediately follows is still more to his honour, and contributed to his great success, namely, that "he was mighty in the scriptures." These are the most pure and copious magazine of pulpit eloquence, and spiritual light. It is there we are furnished with the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season; with those spiritual weapons which most successfully assault the heart, and beat down the kingdom of darkness and vice in it; in a word, with all that is great and worthy in sentiment and style:—not that false and affected glitter, which serves rather to dazzle or please than inform the understanding, and impress the heart; but a style truly natural, nervous, and chaste, suitable to the great subjects spoken of, and springing out of them. And therefore, besides other valuable purposes in giving these inspired writings, this is one, "that the man of God may be perfect, and thoroughly furnished to all good works," 2 Tim. iii. 17; and among the rest, to the faithful discharge of his public ministry.

Secondly, Upon this head of doctrine, it is further said, that "iniquity was not found in his lips." This seems to respect the manner of dispensing the truths of God; and expresses that fidelity and uprightness, that sincerity the apostle rejoiced in; or "not handling the word of God deceitfully," as he elsewhere calls it. And,

1. It may be said of the gospel ministry, that "iniquity is not found in our lips," when these speak the inward sentiments of the heart. And there is a perfect harmony betwixt the two, when we preach the gospel because we believe it, and deliver nothing as the truth of the living God but what in sincerity we think to be so; when the tongue is no channel of dissimulation, or instrument of "speaking lies in hypocrisy," but a faithful index of the mind, and principles that lodge there. It is true, the deceit we now speak of is concealed from mortal eye; and the man may play his part so well, as to preserve his office, and possibly have some success in it; it being the seed,

not the hand that sows it, which is the principle of divine life. But, doubtless, such iniquity is destructive of his own comfort and eternal welfare. Alas! what peace can he have, who has thus renounced probity and candour, is at variance with the Deity and his own conscience? His own heart must reproach him, "and God is greater than the heart, and knoweth all things." In private life, such conduct is detestable; and justly: is it less so in matters of eternal concern? To assume, and continue in an office, which sets us for the defence of the gospel, while that gospel is no other to us than a cunningly-devised fable; to declare, to subscribe this and the other doctrine, as articles of our faith; nay, by our public teaching, to recommend them to the belief of others, while we really look upon them as unintelligible jargon at best, or falsehood perhaps at bottom; what a resemblance is there between the servant who is capable of this, and the master whom he really serves, whom yet he would be ashamed to own, that prince of darkness, who sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light?

2. Iniquity is not found in our lips, when we neither suppress the truths of God, nor dissemble the sins of men;—when we declare the whole counsel of God, preach all the words of this life, and keep back nothing that is profitable to souls;—when we instruct and reprove, exhort and admonish without partiality, without reserve. Great resolution and prudence is necessary to this, it is true; but then we cannot show ourselves faithful workmen, or be approved of God, unless we thus "rightly divide the word of truth." Thus, for example, it is much our duty to open up and explain the mysteries of the gospel; even those of them which some discard because they are mysterious; *i. e.* because God has not revealed more than his incomprehensible wisdom thought meet to do. But it would be iniquity in public teachers, either to omit wholly, or to insist upon these, without showing that they are all doctrines according to godliness; that they have a great tendency to promote, and necessary connection with, universal

sanctity in heart and life. On the other hand, it is incumbent upon us often to inculcate the precepts of our holy religion, of love to God, justice, and sobriety; to unfold the nature, beauty, and necessity of the various graces and duties of the Christian life. But it were defeating the purpose, and corrupting the simplicity of the gospel, if its ministers do not treat these important subjects in an evangelical way; that is, if they preach them without a special relation to Jesus Christ, and his regenerating grace, as the principle and fountain from whence they flow. Thus, to teach the Christian morals as an independent scheme, as a system quite detached from, or having little connection with, the mystery of faith; to do so, I say, were to build without a foundation, and to give our people a stone instead of bread.

The like faithfulness and impartiality should be observed, in reproof the most plausible and authorized errors of the times. Thus, if some are faulty in depreciating human nature,—though it is not easy to conceive what can go further this way than he has done who knows well what is in man,—particularly where it is said, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God,” Rom. viii. 7;—allowing that some do exceed here, and that we ought to warn against it, would it not look partial, and argue a strong bias, to be altogether or very silent upon the other extreme? An extreme as easily, at least, fallen into, and pernicious to vital religion;—I mean, to exalt or rather deify our depraved nature. There may be a superficial acknowledgment of some disorder in it, but so slight that discipline, or reflection on gospel light and motives, will easily remove the disease. This always has been, and still is, the troubler of the church of Christ; the secret but true reason of so much inward contempt of his cross and grace: “For they that be whole need not the physician, but they that are sick,” Matt. ix. 12.

3. The uprightness expressed here, by having no iniquity in our lips, does imply that our motives and aims be pure in entering upon the sacred work, and in the dis-

charging of it. This is an essential branch of gospel sincerity, and dear in God's sight. It is the real though hidden beauty of our character, and a serving him with our spirits in the gospel of his Son. If his honour is at heart in the conversion and salvation of souls, this will make us as a flame of fire in his service, and, in imitation of the angels, do his will with delight. It is this that will bear us up against censure and reproach, persecution, and the indignities of a crooked world; for what are any of these, or all of them, to a resolved affectionate servant of Jesus Christ? But without this, the apparently faithful discharge of duty, the most sound or applauded preaching, and zealous defence of the truth, is all but iniquity in our lips; a specious disguise to palliate our sordid avarice, vanity, and resentment, or such like unlovely passions. It is but a tedious task, and bodily service, yielding no solid joy at the time, and in the end will profit little; for we must preach the gospel willingly, if we would have the reward; preach it from a settled esteem of its blessed Author, and purpose to bring others to esteem him too. This is of such necessity, that it is the only thing insisted upon by our Lord, in the commission given to one of his apostles: "Simon, son of Jonas," said he once and again, "Lovest thou me?" Being satisfied of this, he intrusts him with the feeding of his dear flock. And indeed, if we regard not the Father, it is like the children will but fare poorly on the bread of life distributed by us. If we love not him that begat, how can we love those that are begotten of him? If carnal and worldly views have the ascendant, our spiritual function, in all its parts, will be basely degraded to promote them; besides, they are so gross and polluting, that, where they reign, the soul cannot attend to the beauty of divine things, or have a just relish of them. It is true, we may still do the duties of our office; but, alas! how are they done? as a trade merely, and craft by which we have our living, or theatre whereon we display our gifts, to obtain the praise that is of men. It is of great consequence, therefore, to renounce these hidden

things of dishonesty, to make room for the love of Jesus in the heart; and "if a man purge himself from these," as saith the apostle, 2 Tim. ii. 21, "he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared to every good work."

II. The second general head is the nature of our conversation and life, as expressed here: "He walked with me in peace and equity," says God.

1. He walked "in peace." There seems here to be an allusion to the preceding verse, the covenant of peace mentioned there; a covenant made with the tribe of Levi, or rather the family of Aaron; wherein were promises of God's love, protection, and acceptance, if they were true to his interest, and an honour to their profession. Now, the like engagement is, virtually at least, made with every minister of Christ, and entered into by him. The assuming that character is a tacit profession that we love the Master and the work; it is saying practically, that we devote ourselves to the service of the altar, and vow fidelity to him. And would it not be the better, the more particular and determined we were on this head? Might it not be an additional motive afterward to walk with God, and a means of restoring peace to our minds when perplexed, to consider, that we had entered into such a covenant of peace with him, with great solemnity, and in his presence?

But not to insist on this, the expression, doubtless, does imply, that there is a real friendship and a good understanding between the Master and servant, that the controversy upon both sides, because of sin, is done away, by a gracious pardon, and the healing of our souls; that we have truly transacted upon us, what is represented in vision as done to Joshua the high-priest, Zech. iii. 4; his filthy garments are taken away, his iniquities made to pass from him, and he is clothed with change of raiment. And are we safe, or is it seemly to appear in any other dress when ministering before the Lord? What a paradox is it to be dispensing the word of reconciliation to others,

and we ourselves unreconciled, and enemies to him? In a word, to walk with him in peace, is to value and preserve it firm,—to keep ourselves in the love of God,—by strict vigilance over the heart, and growing measures of purity there,—by frequent appeals to the blood of sprinkling, as the priests repaired to their lavers under the law, where they washed from ceremonial defilements, and were made clean.

2. Walking in peace may express his pacific disposition, and meekness of behaviour in public and private life. He cultivates this quiet temper within, and it appears in his words and actions; speaking the things that will make for peace, and promote it in the church of Christ. He can more willingly forgive a wrong than commit it. He is inoffensive to all, if his purity and love of truth offend them not. He thinks himself bound, indeed, to adhere inviolably to “the faith once delivered to the saints,” and to maintain it as a most precious treasure. But, in matters of opinion, he is far from being overbearing and confident; his moderation in these is exercised toward all. And is there a more lovely part of our character than thus to be the sons of peace; of our character, I say, who serve the Prince, and preach a gospel of peace? To be boisterous and raging, turbulent and factious, is a shameless departure from it. The command was express to the priests under the law, that they should offer no sacrifices to God with strange fire:—but, to blend and mingle our angry passions, even with that which may be zealously meant for his service, is every whit as unbecoming and faulty. “And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, and patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will grant them repentance, to the acknowledgment of the truth,” 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

3. Another part of the road wherein he walks, is that of “equity;” which chiefly points at his duty towards others in private life,—the integrity, truth, and justice of his conduct in the world. In his spirit and words there is no

guile. Fraud and falsehood, even to serve a good cause, are to him an abomination. It is with him a fundamental maxim, to "render to all their due." And though he may be slow in making promises, he is scrupulously faithful in keeping of them. In a word, the equity here spoken of, is such a composition of justice and tender charity, that his character is rather the good than the righteous man. He is conscious that love is a debt which he owes to every one, and is careful to pay it, even to the indigent and unthankful, where he can hope for little again. Without this, pretences to piety are vain, and the disguise so thin, that the discerning world will easily see through it. Of all orders of men, therefore, the gospel ministry should be the righteous nation that keepeth truth, who "do justly, love mercy," as well as "walk humbly with God;" and in both these the great apostle is worthy of our imitation: "And herein do I exercise myself always, to have a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward man," Acts xxiv. 16.

4. We have here his delightful society in this road: "He walked with me," says God; the very character given of Enoch, whom God took. "He walked with me," as one friend does with another; with his eye upon me, to show him directions when in straits; upon me, to stand by him, and support under every burden; upon me, whose hand will soon crown his fidelity with a glorious reward. The expression imports, frequent retirement from the world, and elevation of soul above it; much inwardness with God, and delightful meditation upon divine things. It is certain, that such secret exercises of prayer and communion with God, would inspire our public performances with new life, and make our faces to shine when we came down to our people. Would anything be more absurd, than to find the inscription of the Athenian altar upon our ministrations, "To THE UNKNOWN GOD;" to one, whom we liked neither to converse with, nor retain in our knowledge? The gospel ministers are called angels; and in this sense they should really be so; much about his hand, and stu-

dious of his will, as well as obsequious in fulfilling of it. And were we thus frequently beholding the face of our Father who is in heaven, with what pleasure, and hope of success, might we minister to the sons of men upon earth?

5. This phrase of "walking" implies, that in all this he is regular, uniform, and progressive; that his way is of a piece, and consistent with itself, like "the path of the just, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Nothing short of this can complete the character, or evidence our sincerity in wearing of it. For if we take one step like a saint, another in the course of a present world,—if at one time we personate the servants of Jesus Christ, at another act like the messengers of Satan,—we are self-condemned, and bring discredit upon the whole; our most shining performances must pass, with thinking people, for pageantry and grimace:—and thus, by destroying what we were building up, we are the greatest of all transgressors.

There cannot be a greater solecism than such a conduct in ministers of the gospel. It is loaded with absurdity and contradiction, to appear in the pulpit by our doctrine as angels of light, in our life wallowing in the works of darkness,—preachers of righteousness to other men, but we ourselves unjust and filthy still,—in our sermons expressing great care and zeal to maintain good works, but elsewhere stifling all just inquiries after the immoral, or exerting our talents to screen and support them,—dispensing the holy mysteries of our religion with seeming gravity at one time, at another treating them with irreverence, ridicule, or contempt. In a word, in our public character, "the ambassadors of the churches, and glory of Christ,"—in private, the grief and dishonour of both. And now, what a picture is this? How liable is such behaviour to the pungent sarcasm of holy writ—"Thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery,

dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" Rom. ii. 22.

But, besides the incongruity, such conduct is big with inexpressible malignant fruits, as it dishonours God, stains his gospel and the dispensers of it, creates much perplexity in the souls of good men, is a snare to the unwary, and hardens the wicked in sin; as it makes the immoral minister himself the just object of the lowest contempt, and subjects him at length to the doom of an unprofitable and wicked servant. And, therefore, it is he only who preaches and does also, who shall be great in the kingdom of God, as our Saviour speaks,—he only can have comfort, and hope for success in the dispensing of it. Which brings me to show,

III. The fruit of a gospel ministry, and end of their office; as it is said here, "To turn many away from iniquity,"—to instruct mankind in the whole compass of their duty, and make them happy in practising it,—to translate them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the kingdom of his dear Son. In a word, to disentangle their hearts from the love of sin,—to have them restored to the life and likeness of God,—and thus to exalt human nature to its primitive purity and perfection—I was going to say, beyond it. This is the noble design of the gospel, worthy of its blessed Author to countenance; and the harvest has been in some measure answerable to the seed-time, especially in the infancy of it. It then produced such effects in a day, as all the celebrated philosophy of Greece and Rome could not boast of for ages before. It quickly brought about such a wonderful change in the principles and lives of men, as unenlightened reason had long struggled for, but all in vain: "For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe," 1 Cor. i. 21. And though this effect be not now so discernible, or frequent perhaps, yet there is great reason to believe that the preaching of the cross, just now, in the different parts of the Christian world, is still the

power of God to the saving of many. Now, we who are the dispensers of this mystery, should perfectly coincide with such a design,—making that our aim sincerely which indeed is God's, and in this respect be workers together with him,—not grudging our sweat and labour for that purpose for which the Saviour of men shed his blood, but travelling in birth among our flocks till Christ be formed in them. And when we succeed here, our work and reward go hand in hand. For what is our joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are they not in the Lord, whom we, as instruments in his hand, have turned away from iniquity?

I proceed now to sum up all in a few reflections.

I. From what has been said upon the pastoral character and office, it is obvious, that it is neither a mean one, nor a business only for the indolent and slothful. If the world think so, or any of ourselves, it is because we never knew it. “Who is sufficient for these things?” said a learned and inspired apostle. And if he was not, who of us will pretend to be so? Our work is so important and pure, that it were enough for the highest angel fully to discharge it.

II. As the applauded character in the text is designed for our imitation, we would labour to attain, and be true to every part of it.

1. We would by all means learn the truth, as it is in Jesus, and be well instructed ourselves in the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and then dispense them with all fidelity, and spiritual wisdom. “In our doctrine showing uncorruptedness, sincerity, gravity, sound speech that cannot be condemned;”—applying it with prudence to the infinitely various cases of our people,—to warn the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, and support the weak,—to give milk to babes, and stronger meat to the full-grown. Neither speaking to the grief of those whom God has wounded, nor soothing the delusive hopes of the impenitent sinner. A mistake here, upon either side, may be fatal. And indeed, it requires much holy skill to give every one their portion of meat, according to their circumstances, and in

due season. But there seems to be a general plan and rule of preaching, in copying after which we cannot err; nay, in forming upon it, may humbly hope to attain the most valuable ends of our ministry; and that is, the Spirit's method, when dealing savingly with souls. Now, when he comes for this end, we know it is his way to convince of sin, of righteousness, and judgment. I do not mean that these great subjects, and what is contained in them, should be engrossed in every discourse; no, but that the strain of our sermons argue this to be the plan and model we go upon. And is it wise or faithful not to act in full concert with him, upon whom all success does depend? Can we reasonably expect that any of our flock should "become the epistle of Jesus Christ," when we, who are the pen, as it were, deviate from his direction, and write not according to it? Is it to be looked for from the most eloquent discourses, if the Spirit and Redeemer are little regarded, that these will make the deaf to hear, or inspire dead souls with life? It is a groundless hope. For these purposes, we would strive to make the sinner see his face in the glass of God's holy law, that he may know his guilty state, his polluted nature and life. We would then lead them to Christ, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; for the beginnings, growth, and consummation of the spiritual life; making his name and grace, Spirit and love, triumph in the midst of our sermons.

2. We would give efficacy to our doctrine, and adorn it, by the sanctity of our life, manifesting the inward power of divine truths by a walk expressive of it. It is not enough that this be irreproachable, but everything in it should be worthy of imitation:—"Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity," 1 Tim. iv. 12. An ignorant minister is, no doubt, a contradiction; being the same as an eye that does not see, or a guide to the blind, but stone-blind himself. But is an immoral one a less absurdity? Is there greater inconsistency, than the servant of the living God to be polluted with dead works? Or is it enough that we

be men of God in the pulpit, but anywhere else workers of iniquity, carnal, or profane? The rules of life given to the priests, under the law, were exceeding strict; and it seems, that, for a single offence in them, the sin-offering was as great as for the whole congregation of Israel. And will we plead for greater liberty now, under a gospel dispensation, which far exceeds that in purity and glory? Surely not. What was inscribed upon Aaron's mitre, ought to be engraven on our hearts, and shine in the life, HOLINESS TO THE LORD.

3. If the above character be so essential to the rulers of God's church, then none ought to be continued or admitted there who want it; none whose ignorance, vanity, or worldly views, may have led them to swerve from the truth, to corrupt the simplicity of the gospel, and in their doctrine to speak perverse things; none whose practice proclaims them unworthy of some low employments, much more of this high and holy calling. To guard against this evil, is certainly one of the most important branches of our trust; and left to our care with a particular charge, that we commit the dispensing of this glorious gospel "to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also," 2 Tim. ii. 2. And no language can express the caution and zeal that is necessary here; on the one hand, not to encourage, or be misled by the malicious informer, a detestable race of men; nor, on the other, if presumptions are shrewd, to stifle inquiries against the suspected and guilty, or stop the course of justice when found to be so. In such cases, to listen to friendship and connection, to be swayed by party and cabal, is betraying a weighty trust; it is to partake of other men's sins; nay, to give them our public sanction, and proclaim impunity to the vices of our order. And whatever may be said from the specious and common topic of charity, such tender mercy to one is cruelty to many. And, from a few instances of lenity of this kind, more is to be feared to true Christianity, than from a thousand Tindals, Independent Whigs, or even the writings of a nobler pen.¹

¹ 'Characteristicks.'

Nor have I known a more awful judgment on a good man, and his whole family, than what came upon Eli for tenderness of this sort;—a stroke which made ears to tingle then;—it has its voice still, and men of wisdom will hear it. It is impossible, I own, to show regard enough for candidates to the holy ministry, whose parts and behaviour are promising; who, we have ground to think, are entirely in the interests of Christianity and its blessed Author. They have a just title to the dearest love of every good man, and to ours in particular; for they are dear to God,—they are the hope of posterity,—and, it is likely, will be peopling the New Jerusalem, when many of us are in the dust. But the contrary character must have the opposite and most dismal effects. “Ye are the salt of the earth,” says our Lord, speaking of the first ministers of his kingdom; “but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men,” Matt. v. 13. Intimating, that, as to the case of such corrupt teachers, it is next to incurable,—that the effects of their corruption are extremely pernicious to others,—and that the body cannot be well till such mortified members are cut off from it.

Nor is the above reasoning to be confined only to ministers of the gospel; it manifestly extends to another order of men, who share the rule of the house of God with us, and are known by the name of elders. It has been, and still is, the felicity of this church to have such within her as worthily fill that station; whose private life is as much an ornament to religion, as their distinguished talents are a real service to it, and the guardian of it in their public character. Now, the more benign and desirable these fruits are, the more should we avoid what may introduce the contrary of them among us; making always a point of it, not to admit promiscuously to that office; and very attentive to it, that they maintain the dignity and purity of their character, after admission. This our church has

wisely enjoined;¹ and that our inquiries about it, in presbytery and synod, be frequent, and without respect of persons; though this, so far as I know, is almost universally neglected. And, to omit every thing else, there is this weighty reason for the attention and inquiry recommended, that otherwise we may be under the strongest temptations, and run the risk of making shipwreck of honesty, faith, and candour, by solemnly attesting that men have such and such qualifications, when all the world, and we ourselves may easily know, that indeed they have them not; —*i. e.*, we do in a public capacity, when sitting as judges in the name of Christ, what in our private conduct would render us infamous for ever. Surely such a sacrifice and offering of honesty and truth, is too valuable to be made to the highest human greatness, much more to any semblance of it; and returns so notoriously false, are too criminal to be expiated by five hundred pounds of fine, though it were competent to the General Assembly to exact it of us. Men will speak of evils, as they apprehend evil in them; but this I take to be a cardinal one, which, if not prevented, or removed, as it takes place, many others will quickly follow. These hints are sufficient from me, upon a subject, as I conceive, of the highest moment; how far they are either just or seasonable, is not mine to determine.

4. Having received this ministry, let us not faint in the discharging of it; from this consideration among many others, that “our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.” In being faithful, we will not only save our own souls, but, it is likely, many of those that hear us; or, as it is said here, “turn many away from iniquity.” And what a god-like and heavenly design is this! How great is the pleasure of having it sincerely in our aim! But much more when we attain it. Nay, supposing a faithful minister were to be wholly without success, which I doubt to have ever been the case, yet is not God so unrighteous, as to

¹ See Acts of Assembly, 1722.

forget his labour and work of love; but where there is a sowing in hope, how pure is the joy of being a partaker of our hope? To find some under our ministry born again, and become heirs of glory, whom, with concern we had looked upon as lost, and vessels of eternal wrath; what an addition will this be to our crown in the other world? "For they that turn many to righteousness," in that spotless assembly "shall shine as the stars for ever and ever," Dan. xii. 13.

It is true, and it cannot be frequently enough inculcated upon our minds, that the winning of souls to Christ, is not from profound learning, and flowing eloquence, shining holiness, or such like endowments of men; no, our success, as well as sufficiency, is of God. Conscious, therefore, of our own weakness, we should breathe our ardent desires to him, for help in our work, and that almighty blessing which alone can inspire dead souls with life for evermore. Whilst we fight in this valley below, against the kingdom and power of darkness, like another Moses, our hands would be lifted up, and our hearts toward heaven, from whence cometh all our aid.

5. If such be our ministry and work, then we may demand it of our people, not to defeat the end of it upon themselves:—as workers together with God, we may beseech you not to receive his grace in vain. Shall your souls be dear in our sight, but vile in your own? Shall we, in much humility and many tears, be asking mercy for you, and will you yourselves reject it? Is the kingdom of God opened up by our ministry, and will not you be prevailed upon to enter it? Did the Son of God shed his blood, and set up his gospel, to "turn many away from iniquity," and are you determined to live and die in your sins? And are we thus to labour in vain, and spend our strength for nought among you? Your impenitence and unbelief would make it so; but it will not be in vain for all that to the faithful pastor; for, says the apostle, "we are a sweet savour unto God, in them that believe, and also in them that perish."

SERMON II.

ADMISSION SERMON.¹

ROM. x. 15.—“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

THERE were few things in the Christian revelation incensed the nation of the Jews more, than the admission of the Gentile world into the kingdom of their Messiah, and that they should share equally with them in the blessings of it. Though there were early and repeated predictions of this event, they could not believe, nor indeed hear it with patience. “Away with this fellow!” cried the enraged multitude, speaking of this same apostle—“it is not fit,” said they, “that he should live;” because he hinted his commission to go to the Gentiles. This point, however, he labours frequently to establish; and particularly shows in this context, that, in the momentous matter of a sinner’s justification and acceptance with God, Jew and Gentile stand upon a level. But, in order to share in these privileges, the Gentile world must be acquainted with them—for faith comes by hearing—and acquainted with them by a means and method which God himself should authorize. For how shall they preach, or hope to treat successfully with sinners about this salvation, unless they are sent? And then follows the illustration of this subject in the words which I have read: “As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel

¹ Preached at Paisley, June 16, 1757.

of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" These words are quoted from Isaiah lii. 7. and literally refer to Israel's release from Babylon by the Persian monarch's decree; and by way of accommodation here, to a much more important redemption through Jesus Christ, published in the gospel. More particularly, let us consider,

I. The subject and message ministers are sent with; viz. "the gospel of peace," and "glad tidings of good things."

II. Their work and duty with respect to these; viz. to preach and bring these tidings.

III. The respect due to such a message, and those who bring it: "How beautiful are their feet!"

Lastly, A few inferences from the whole.

I. To return to the first of these; viz. The subject and message which the ministers of Christ are charged with, called here, "the gospel of peace," and "glad tidings of good things." More generally,

1. This gospel is a constitution and covenant of mercy, for restoring fallen man to the love and likeness of God. It is replete with inestimable blessings,—points out the foundation on which they stand,—and the way in which they are dispensed through a Mediator. It is not so much the promulgation of a law, as a remedial dispensation, suited to the wretchedness and woe of the revolting creature,—with this merciful aspect, the guilty sinner had the first notice of it,—and, in every future discovery, it shined with more conspicuous grace. It is true that the religion of nature, and the whole obligations of piety and virtue, which reason can approve, are adopted into this plan, and an essential branch of it; and it is the glory of revelation to illuminate these fundamental truths, and enforce these obligations with motives most powerful and piercing. But to make these our only subject, or to treat other things slightly, and by the bye as it were, is to falsify or maim our message, to impoverish Christianity, and, indeed, to preach another gospel. More particularly,

2. In an eminent manner, it is the gospel of peace with

God. This is the subject that runs through the whole of revelation, and adorns the New Testament pages with beauty and glory;—that obnoxious as we were to his righteous displeasure, and a deserved curse, his purpose toward us was love;—that God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, through the blood and death of his Son. Though justly provoked, he is rendered propitious,—a foundation is laid for union and friendly correspondence,—that, upon our humble return to God, and faith in this blood, debts will be forgiven, and bonds cancelled,—we shall be made the righteousness of God in him, and again to stand high in his favour.

3. It is a gospel which restores the corrupt degenerate sinner to peace with himself, and to all around him. It not only inculcates the restraint of our appetites, and subduing rebellious passions, the mortifying our affections to the world, and moderation toward the things thereof; it not only binds the law of kindness and love upon the heart, the observance of which would make society a quiet, delightful habitation; but what merits our particular notice, and is a peculiar glory of this gospel, it is a ministration of the Spirit, whose diversity of wondrous gifts adorned the infant church of Christ, and still adorns every re-made soul with the more amiable beauty of holiness; whose mighty preventing influence repairs the sad desolations made by sin, replaces the disjointed powers of the soul; and thus, by restoring inward health and soundness, makes them to abound in the fruits, and walk in that path of righteousness, the effect whereof is quietness and assurance for ever. A ministration of that Spirit, who, as a Comforter, fills the soul with the peace of believing; and, by attesting the truth of grace, gives good men the real enjoyment of God, themselves, and things about them, and partly to enjoy heaven upon earth, in the refreshing hope of it.

In this sense now, the subject and message ministers are charged with, is the gospel of peace. It would be to light a candle at noon, to expatiate upon the other part of its

description here,—that it is “glad tidings of good things.” If the smiles of heaven, and freedom from its wrath, redemption from sin, and being made alive to God,—if victory over the world, death, and hell, with the hope of eternal glory,—if these be glad tidings to the condemned, the enslaved, and the miserable,—they are the news, the blessings brought to us, and bestowed by the gospel. And so said the angel, when publishing the nativity of the new-born Saviour: “Fear not,” said he, “for, behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people,” Luke ii. 10. We proceed now,

II. To consider a minister’s work, with respect to the gospel, and these glad tidings—He is to preach and bring them. Such is the language of our Lord’s commission: “Go, preach the gospel to every nation,” Mark xvi. 15; publish my character and mission to the world; give the history of my life and miracles, sayings, sufferings, and death; my resurrection; the dispensation of grace which, as head of my church, I am carrying on, and the kingdom of glory that shall succeed it. Unfold the redemption I have wrought for sinners; the inestimable blessings which I am ready to confer; and on what terms I bestow them. Declare the whole counsel of God, and keep nothing back that may be profitable to souls. More particularly,

1. We should preach to the understandings of men. I do not mean, that we ought not to preach what is incomprehensible, and that ‘all mysteries are to be discarded; God forbid. This is a boasted refinement, only becoming those mighty sons of reason, who think it a reproach to build their assent upon infallible truth, and the authority of God. If Christianity had no mysteries in it, that itself, I conceive, were enough to render it incredible; for who would imagine, that, in a revelation of the divine nature, perfections, counsels, and government, there should be nothing said beyond the grasp of our present capacity and powers? Our eyes have their mysteries, and our reason too, and why not our faith? Mysteries then we may, we must preach, and be rational preachers too. But on these,

and other subjects, we would be perspicuous and plain ; by the easiest forms of speech, we would enter the understanding, and lead to the knowledge of the truth, not only in opening the articles of faith, and duties of the Christian life, but the grounds on which we believe the one, and our obligations to the other.

2. We should preach to the heart. Cold argument and reasoning are very insufficient to bow the will, and conquer its reluctance ; and, therefore, the affections should be gained, in favour of the cause we plead for. To this purpose, seriousness and fervency of spirit, a becoming vehemence will be necessary ; every tender or terrible, compassionate or awful mode of discourse, that may smite the sleepy soul, awake it to attention, and rouse its sorrow or triumph, love, hope, or fear. Examples of this sacred oratory abound in holy writ, and upon these we should form ; that, by proper use and imitation of them, we may acquire the happy skill of reigning over the hearts of an assembly. This solemnity and ardour may be a subject for the satire of your quietists in preaching, the advocates for rational repose and languor in the pulpit. But let the ill-placed ridicule fall where it ought. Are sinners hot in pursuing their wicked courses ; and may not we be warm in calling them to repentance ? In important worldly concerns, do men act in character, when they are all life and activity ? when eternity is at stake, may we not be, may we not appear ~~to~~ be in earnest ? Are the passions indeed a part of our frame ? a part of our frame given us by a wise and most indulgent God ? How absurd is it to say, that they ought not to be kindled in his service ? As if it were the riches, and pleasures, and honours of the world alone, and not the kingdom of heaven, that is to be taken by force.

3. And lastly on this head—The gospel preacher should condescend, and be particular in his address to hearers. As their character and spiritual state is very various, we should speak accordingly ; having to do with the presumptuous and humble, stupid and awakened, sincere and

hypocritical, with tempted and triumphing souls. This is rightly to divide the word of God, when we speak as having to do with saints and sinners, the unregenerate and born again, the children of wrath and sons of God. This most important of distinctions we would mainly attend to. It runs through our Lord's sermons and parables, the discourses of his apostles, those finished models of gospel preaching. Without it, ours will be defective, will be pernicious. The vague and undistinguishing manner tends to cherish presumption, and lay the conscience asleep; it seems to suppose, and thereby flatters with the destructive conceit, that the hearers are all Christians indeed, when they are not so. That if a little further reformation is necessary, and improvement of habits, by their own industry they may be easily attained to. Thus, by such loose and general harangues, they are led to walk in the light of their own fire, and sparks which they have kindled, till they lie down in disappointment and sorrow. We proceed to consider,

III. The respect due to the gospel message, and those who bear it. How beautiful are the feet of such! How welcome was the officer who blew the trumpet, and proclaimed the jubilee in the land of Judea!—the sound of which extinguished debts, returned the mortgaged fortune, and let the bond-servant go free from his master. With what open arms would the courier be received, when, hastening from town to town, he published that Israel's captivity was over; that oppressed weeping exiles might return to their native country, their desired friends and home, and to mount Zion, the joy of all their land? Some such regard, it is supposed here, is due to those who preach the gospel, and bring glad tidings of better things. Whatever amiable excellencies a minister may be possessed of, and however worthy of esteem, an additional share may be claimed for his office' sake, and pursuing the purposes of it. For being sent by Christ, he speaks in his name, and is supported by his authority. He treats with sinners, not about the concerns of time, but immortal interests;

he is embarked in the same bottom with his hearers; has the same prize of eternity at stake; and the loss of it to any, through his fault, dreadfully endangers his own. Hence are those exhortations: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake," 2 Thèss. v. 12, 13; "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account," Heb. xiii. 17.

I shall now proceed to a few reflections on this subject.

I. Is a grateful respect due to the message and ministry of the gospel?—is it a privilege and truly desirable to meet with this?—then popularity is far from being a term of reproach. Nor is it a blemish on our character, or hindrance to our work, but the contrary, that we are not despicable, but received as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Such was the reception the apostle met with at Galatia; and how earnest is he to find the same credit and kind acceptance elsewhere: "I beseech you, brethren," says he to the Christians at Rome, "for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints." In every other character and station, from the monarch down to the mechanic, such credit is thought no dishonour or infelicity; nor is it so in ours. It is not recorded as a blot upon a great prince in Israel, that "whatsoever he did pleased the people;" nor of a much greater than he, that "the common people heard him gladly." No doubt, this influence may be courted by means unworthy and base; and, like other good things, abused to purposes as unworthy. But a favour it is from heaven, and to be made subservient to the great ends of our office. To be unacceptable, therefore, to our flock, or detested by them, must be a sorry mark of merit, or superior worth; and an abandoned mind that minister must have, who can pique and value himself upon such an excellence.

II. Having seen this principal part of our work, let us be persuaded, my dear brethren, to give ourselves wholly to it. When publishing the news of salvation, we should be attentive, that our authority and intelligence be good, derived from the pure fountain of light, the Scriptures of eternal truth; these are they that testify of Christ. If ever we succeed in reforming any of our hearers, in turning their hearts to God, and holy living, it is the voice of mercy through a Mediator, that will most powerfully allure the labouring thoughtful soul to return. It is the promise of his mighty Spirit for mortifying sin, and enabling to holy practice, that will animate a feeble sinner to attempt it. It is the attractive view of glory, as revealed in the gospel, that most effectually moves the soul onward, and animates it to make its way through the smiles and terrors of the world. This is that foolishness of preaching by which God hitherto hath converted and saved. The wanton wit of man may refine, new-model, or explain it away; but, from the beginning to the end of revelation, this appears to be the scheme approved by the wisdom of God. It would be highly unseasonable at this day,—it would be criminal complaisance to the infidel tribe, and contribute to increase their growing number,—if we, the preachers of Christianity, did conceal or mince the peculiar glories of it. The more spitefully that Deists run these down, with proportioned zeal should we illustrate, establish, and support the honour of them.

III. Nor should we confine this work to our public ministrations, and the Sabbath, but preach by our daily practice:—and in this sense some understand the words, “How beautiful are their feet!” signifying the exemplary purity of their conversation who preach the gospel. And without this, the former, it is likely, will not be fruitful, or have great force. It will be allowed, that, upon our sacred profession, there lie additional obligations to a holy life; that, by our very employment, we are more conversant than others with motives to piety and grave deportment. If these are observed to operate faintly upon us, it will, in all likeli-

hood, wholly defeat them upon others. For instance, did we pay little regard to the Lord's day, family religion, and the like; no wonder if others condemn them. Are we found, in the appearances of evil, often bordering on the confines of vice?—this will have a fatal tendency to lead others a step further, and throw them headlong into it. On this account I conceive the card table, and other amusements, the most known murderers of precious time, can have little sanction from us; the stage none at all, but rather our frown:—the stage, I say, that artful engine to banish the sober, the manly, the devout, from among ministers and mankind. Of such infinite importance is it, that, through the week, we hold forth the word of life which we preached on Sabbath; that we take heed to ourselves, as well as to our doctrine, that in so doing we may save our own souls, and those that hear us. Amen.

SERMON III.

CHRIST THE SINNER'S REFUGE.

HEB. vi. 18.—“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

WHAT John the Divine says of his epistolary writings, may be said of evangelical doctrines in general, “they were written that the Christian’s joy may be full.” In particular, the immutability of the covenant of grace,—the consideration that it is ordered in all things, and its mercies sure,—are a source of abundant comfort, as well as a powerful inducement to duty. However precious the promises of God may be, were he man that he could lie, or the son of man that he could repent, what ground of perplexity were this! What bitter waters would such a fountain send forth! But the soul that has taken hold of his covenant, and knows that it is unchangeable, may enter into rest. And so the apostle would have us to understand the matter, from these words which I have read: “That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” Whence I shall attempt to give some account,

I. Of this hope set before us.

II. Of this figurative expression, and the character contained in it, of flying for refuge to lay hold upon this hope.

III. The nature, qualities, and ground of the consolation of those who have thus fled. And then some improvement.

1. By this hope, we may understand Christ himself, who is the object, foundation, and author of his people's hope. Hence it is the name by which he is called, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God our Saviour, and commandment of the Lord Jesus our HOPE," 1 Tim. i. 1. He was the hope of the Old Testament saints; and they looked for great things at his coming. Upon his character and mediation depend all our expectations still, and on him alone. Insomuch that to live "without Christ" is, in Scripture language, the same as to be "without hope in the world." What the known clemency of a prince is to the condemned criminal, and the experienced kindness of a wealthy friend to one in jail, or when carried into captivity; much more than these is Christ to souls dead in law, and enslaved by sin. Expectation from the former sources may be cut off and fail; but the Lord Jesus is the sure support of a sinful sinking world. In him are such treasures of wisdom, merit, and grace, and such benignity to bestow them, that they who believe and build on him shall never be ashamed of their hope.

2. By this hope may be meant that eternal life which is the final happiness of good men, and completion of all their desires. And so the words following my text would lead us to understand it. "Which hope," says the inspired writer, "we have as an anchor to the soul both sure and stedfast, entered to that within the vail." This is the blessed, the lively hope saints are begotten to; the immortal prize which they contend for:—and though I have mentioned it under a separate head, it really coincides with, and runs up into the former. Our title to that happiness, our meetness for it, our perseverance in the way, and possession of it in the end, are derived to us only through Christ, and faith in him. "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory," Col. i. 27.

3. This hope is said to be set before us; namely by divine revelation. It is only in gospel, that is, in God's

light, that we can clearly see it. In the ancient schools of philosophy, the doctrine of a future state was rather a problem and conjecture, than a fixed unwavering article of their faith. But with respect to a Mediator between God and man, effectually to reconcile both, they were entirely in the dark. Till God was pleased to make the discovery, the world by all their wisdom knew it not. The deepest researches of their wisdom left them ignorant in a great measure of the disease and death, or moral malady brought upon human nature. How, then, can we expect that they should find out the cure?

“By the law is the knowledge of sin;” by the gospel we hear of a Saviour. Under the Old Testament there was a dark exhibition of this mystery; now it is unveiled. And now it is set before us, not for amusement, far less to be the scorn of the thoughtless and profane:—no, but to be considered with great attention; to be viewed in its excellency and beauty, utility and comfort; and that perceiving its perfect suitableness to our condition, such as feel their need may take the benefit of it. Courts of justice among men are not more established for redressing wrongs, nor hospitals built for receiving the helpless and infirm, than this hope is revealed to relieve distressed souls, and save the miserable. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” I proceed,

II. To inquire into the import of this expression, and illustrate the character described by it,—that of flying for refuge to lay hold on this hope. There is a manifest allusion here to the cities of refuge under the law; they are of divine ordination, and an illustrious type of Jesus Christ. The institution of them is recorded Numb. xxxv., and mentioned again in Josh. xx. They were appointed as a place of safety for the casual manslayer; a sanctuary from the resentment and rage of the surviving friends of the slain. Within their walls only the unfortunate man could promise upon being sheltered; and flying thither is used by the Spirit of God, to express the most gracious

and gospel method of a sinner's escaping incensed justice, and wrath to come. They "fly for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them." Which implies,

1. Not only that they are in imminent danger, but sensible of it. To be in great fear, where no ground of fear is,—to fly when none pursues,—is ridiculous and unaccountable panic. But this was not the case with the involuntary manslayer under the law; far less is it the case with the obnoxious rebel against the Majesty of heaven. The risk he runs is not of losing natural life only, but his immortal soul; and the jeopardy he stands in is unutterably great. The pursuer here is a consuming fire,—the man's sins have made him as it were like dried stubble:—and upon what unequal terms must these meet? The Pursuer is one who has said, "Vengeance is mine, and I will repay;" who has already bent his bow, and prepared for the offender every instrument that can wound or kill the soul.

The sinner perhaps has often heard of this by the hearing of the ear, and it made little impression; but now his eyes do see it. He now perceives his nature and practice to be such, that he is the man with whom God is angry every day,—that these arrows of the Almighty, whose poison drink up the spirit, are pointed against him,—and that his wonted security is but a refuge of lies. Every former ground of hope being swept away, his iniquity has found him out. His own conscience, and God who is greater than the heart, have pronounced him guilty. In consequence of this,

2. There is abundant concern and solicitude after some means and method of safety. For though the inquisitive soul may know of salvation in general; yet as to the particular way of certainly coming at it, a thousand obstacles may seem to be in his road. Thus, under the law, though the manslayer had heard that there were cities of refuge; that, by divine appointment, the roads were to be patent; yet might he have perplexity enough, whether this or another was most safe, and the shortest to his desired shelter.

Just so in matters of eternal concern. The thoughts that formerly ran after every vanity are now called home. The anxious man is in use now to meditate upon the one thing needful, and has solemn communings with his own spirit. What will the provoked Deity be pleased with?—what must I do, not for daily bread or clothing, but to be saved? This, with every sensible sinner, is the superior concern. With some, their perplexity darkens almost into despair, while they look on the right hand, and behold no man; and on the left, and there is no deliverer. All refuge seems to fail. In their apprehension, there is none to care for the soul; and, if they dare to look up to God, are apt to say, “Is his mercy clean gone?”

3. Flying for refuge implies a persuasion, in some degree at least, of being safe by following this course. What else could induce the manslayer to run from the wife of his bosom, and fruit of his body; to leave his family and inheritance for a town where he was a stranger? Nothing, surely, but the prospect of escaping destruction could make him break through connections so strong and tender. And what else could give him hope of safety by this flight, but the authority and ordination of God? The six cities of refuge were not more impregnable than the other towns in Israel; but by getting into any of them, he abode as it were under the shade of the Almighty. In like manner, the humble convinced sinner is made to know that his case, though dangerous, is not desperate; and that all hope of being saved is not quite gone.

The grounds of this hope are, God's own appointment of a Mediator, and the strongest assurances given of mercy through him; public intimation by the gospel, that divine love has made this wonderful provision, unsolicited by the wretched and unworthy. And what may not be expected from such an astonishing exhibition of grace? Is it not reviving, thinks the formerly distressed soul, that he whom the Father hath sealed is well-affected to redeeming work, and able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God through him? That there never was an instance of any

such cast out or rejected by him? On the contrary, there are examples of the most enormous offenders who have been forgiven, and of the most filthy washed in his blood? With considerations of this kind, the expiring hope is cherished. When powerfully impressed upon the dejected mind, they are as life from the dead, and put the soul in motion; make it lift up its eyes, and eagerly look for the much desired city of refuge. Accordingly,

4. The truth and glory of the gospel way of salvation being now seen, there is a most cordial approbation of it. The hope set before the pursued offender is actually laid hold upon, and embraced with open arms. There is a thankful acceptance of the unspeakable gift of God, in the whole of his character, and for all the purposes of pardon, purity, and eternal life. With the same cordiality is the penitent soul willing to be enrolled a subject of the Redeemer's kingdom, and bound to his service for ever. Having happily arrived at the city of refuge, he is determined to abide there; saying of it as God did once of Zion—"This is my rest; here will I stay, for I like it well."

These various exercises of the soul are understood much better from experience, than from language or description. The Desire of all nations is all its desire,—Christ in his blood; Christ in his government and sceptre. O what humility now, and unfeigned discarding all refuges of lies! What trembling, accompanied with trust! What tears of holy joy! And what ardour, expressed here by flying! The cause being too momentous, and the danger too great, to admit of lingering or delay. In a word, what fervency of prayer to him, who is "the hope of Israel, and Saviour thereof in time of need." Leaving the other branch of this text to another opportunity, let me, from what has been said, observe,

I. How subservient the affections—particularly those of hope and fear—are to the purposes of vital religion; for so they are represented here, and in many other passages of holy writ. There they appear as the original springs,

and inward movements to a course of action, which tends to our peace and final welfare. The passions, therefore, instead of being the poison of our reason, are frequently aiding to it. They rouse it out of its woful lethargy and stupor, to attend to our most important concerns. To say, then, that it is slavish and mercenary to be urged by these into the way of peace, and service of God, is either to arraign the Author of nature who hath planted such affections in man; or ridiculously to affirm, that hope and fear may be of some use to our present and secular, but of none to our eternal interests.

If vice is the misery of the creature,—if it not only incommode him in this life, but will, when unrepented of, bring him to endless ruin,—how absurd is it to say, that he may be regardless of this consideration, though full in his view, or may be little affected with it? Surely the Spirit of all wisdom, who knows what is in man, has thought otherwise, while using arguments to operate upon hope and fear. He knows that expectation prompts to pursue the suitable good, and that the terrors of the Lord have a tendency to persuade to fly from the wrath to come.

Why else has God placed that monitor, Conscience, in our bosom? Why given it such authority,—authority to summon the criminal, to judge, and pronounce him worthy of death? Will it condemn? Will this lion roar, and the transgressor not tremble, or perhaps sue for mercy? It is impossible. And, therefore,

II. How expedient, or rather necessary, is it to make known to sinners the guilt and vileness of their nature and practice, with their danger upon that account of the damnation of hell? Suppose now the conviction to be strong, that they are a generation of vipers, deeply infected with the poison of the old serpent, and children of wrath; then, and not till then, will they seriously think of the warning to fly from the wrath to come. It is only where a sense of sin does abound, that esteem of gospel grace will abound likewise. And as no man will submit to the amputation of a bodily member, unless he apprehend that the

mortification is dangerous or incurable; neither will the sinner give up his darling lusts, till he see their deformity, and feel them a burden too heavy for him to bear. Thus gospel grace is never so sweet as when it is seasonable; and at no time more seasonable, than in the critical hour when misery is weighing us down, and tender mercy alone steps in and turns the scale.

Such subjects of an awakening nature may offend the delicate ear of the proud and profane. In scornful satire, it may be called Preaching hell and damnation, or terrifying men into their duty. But was not Noah, from the prospect of danger, impelled to his own and family's preservation? Such too was the manner of the Baptist's preaching, and indeed of a much greater than he. "He that believeth not," says our Lord, "is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him." Nay, in the conclusion of the ninth chapter of Mark's Gospel, three times we have these awful expressions from the lips of grace and truth, "Where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

III. Is this in our text your character, my brethren? Have you indeed fled for refuge to the hope set before you? To assist you in this inquiry, pray call to mind the explication already given of this exercise. It is without foundation, I apprehend, and would have bad consequences, to assert, that such a particular series of feelings, and that in the same order and degree, is experienced by all the children of God, when first brought to the Saviour. The generation of the righteous know that it is otherwise,—that though it is the same Spirit who worketh in all, there is diversity in his manner of working. In every one, however, who has truly found refuge in Christ, the great lines of it are the same. There is such a full persuasion of their misery, and being utterly helpless, that, from the heart, they adopt the apostle's assertion: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ came into the world to save sinners." To all of them he is exceeding precious; particularly in the merit of his cross, and power

of his resurrection ; in the pardon, purity, peace, and eternal life he has purchased, and confers on his people, as well as the glory that followed to himself.

If thus you have made him your refuge, let me counsel you to abide there. By the law of Moses the manslayer behoved, at the peril of his life, to stay within the city of refuge till the death of the high-priest. Just so, would you be in peace and safety, your stay with the High-priest of our profession must be, not for a time only, but for ever ; "for he dieth no more." It was by believing that your soul first entered into rest. Keep yourselves in his faith and love, and attend upon the various appointed means of communion with him. Guard against the excursions of the heart into the fields of folly and vice, the vain and defiling fashions of a world lying in wickedness ; for the case, in this respect, resembles that of Israel in Egypt—within the doors sprinkled with paschal blood, there was neither crying nor death ; without them, destruction rode in triumph.

IV. Let me call upon the self-righteous and secure, the stout-hearted and profane, to follow the course exhibited in this text. You cannot but be conscious of a thousand indignities which you have done the Majesty of heaven. It is fatal flattery to think that he will not demand the debt, or that you have ways and means to extinguish it. How, then, art thou prepared to meet him ? How will thine heart endure when he calls thee to an account ?—when he reckons for contempt of his authority, and abuse of richest grace ? Whatever way thou mayest smother such pungent reflections, it is a refuge of lies which the storm of divine wrath will sweep away. While out of Christ, thy way is dark and slippery, and the angel of the Lord pursues thee close behind. Be persuaded, therefore, to fly to the Rock of thy salvation : for his sake make no tarrying,—he waits to be gracious. Were I urging thee to meet an inexorable enemy, thou mightest well be motionless and refuse to stir ; but that is not the case. There is hope set before thee,—even before them who have sinned almost

beyond the verge of mercy. Hope of remission of sins that are past, and of a most kind reception into favour. That instead of reproaching thee with former ingratitude and follies, he will cover them with the tenderness of a father. In a word, the hope of putting thee among his children on earth, and setting thee as a prince about his throne in glory

SERMON IV.

CHRIST THE SINNER'S REFUGE.

HEB. vi. 18.—“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

HAVING discoursed of this hope set before us, and of flying to it for refuge; the privilege of those who have fled for that purpose is now to be explained:—which I shall essay, By illustrating the nature and qualities of the consolation which they partake of who have fled for refuge to this hope;—Then the foundation and ground of it, viz. “two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie;”—With a few reflections.

This consolation, in general, is the rest and refreshing, the sabbath and satisfaction of the soul; from the firm belief of God's gracious promises in Christ, and experience of their sacred power and energy. It is a joy and peace in believing. The immediate author of it is the Holy Ghost, who therefore is so often styled “the Comforter.” The usual means and promoters of it, are the word and dispensers of the gospel. Hence ministers are said to be the “helpers of his people's joy.” More particularly,

1. The world cannot give this consolation, nor does it spring from any thing earthly. From the bounteous hand of God we are surrounded with a variety of objects which minister to our comfort in a present life. But compared with this consolation, the best of them are mean; others sordid, base, or brutal; all of them broken cisterns, that rather disappoint than quench our thirst. Thus it is with

the delights of the worldling in his abundant wealth, and the ambitious in his titles and splendid retinue; with the epicure in his sumptuous table, and the debauchee in his foul gratifications. Like the fountain from which they flow, their joys are muddy, tumultuous, and transient. But this consolation flows from the pure river of life, the streams whereof make glad the city of our God. Which leads me to observe,

2. That it is from above, and spiritual. Hence, in the book of Job, they are called "the consolations of God," to express their origin and excellency. This consolation is delicious fruit, and tastes strongly of heaven. It grows not but on the tree of life, and the heirs of paradise alone relish and eat of it. They begin to taste its sweetness, when their great and dearest concerns are settled upon a sure foundation. After much perplexity, or being on the confines of despair, their heart is now at rest about the things that belong to their eternal peace. They have "good hope through grace," knowing with some degree of assurance "in whom they have believed."

How savoury and reviving must such a persuasion be! Is a remission highly relished by the condemned malefactor?—recovery by him that has been long sick?—and are tidings of a ransom comfortable to the galley-slave? Transporting no doubt! But what are these to the joy of "having received the atonement?"—to the consolation of being set at liberty from the tyranny of sin and chains of the devil, which bind the soul to eternal perdition? Shall the joy of harvest, or of them that divide the spoil, be once compared with the Christian's, when God lifts on him the light of his countenance, gives the prospect of victory over death, and the hope of glory?

3. It is called "strong consolation" in the text; and it is so with regard to the internal sense and perception of it by the happy person. When God is pleased to speak peace, and grace is in lively exercise,—when conscience gives its applauding testimony, and the Spirit condescends to bear witness,—when all these fountains of consolation

are broken up at once,—what a spring-tide of it must flow in upon the soul! This probably is a rare attainment; nor will our present state admit that it be of long continuance. But while it does continue, how strong is the highly favoured man for labour? It makes the heart impregnable almost against the attacks of Satan, and artful temptations. It reinforces the soul; and, though formerly faint, repairs its vigour, for the service of God and duties of the Christian life. “The joy of the Lord is their strength,” Neh. viii. 10. For it holds invariably true, that good men are never more active for God, or abounding in his work, than when they live in the joyful sense of his friendship.

4. This consolation is abiding and permanent; and so the apostle calls it: “And God, even our Father, who has given us everlasting consolation,” 2 Thess. ii. 16. Other joys fall into decay and death. Like the world, and the things of it whence they spring, they will pass away. In sickness sore, or a tempest of passion,—in distress from a wounded conscience, or the near approach of death,—they are tasteless as the white of an egg. In such circumstances the sinner’s mirth is changed into mourning, and his laughter into heaviness. But however afflicted the children of God may be, there is still strong consolation in Christ, and comfort of love to him. As to their own apprehension and sense, this comfort may decay; but its root cannot be torn up, nor the seed of it within be utterly extinguished.

Is it the saint’s lot to be covered with reproach, and have his name as it were cast out from among men?—yet may he rejoice that it is written in heaven. Is he bowed down with bodily affliction, or the weight of years?—under this burden he faints not, while the inward man is renewing day by day. In a word, are his present trials so various and many that he can neither see how to get rid of them, nor when they shall end? All this notwithstanding, the steadfast view of the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul, will inspire with “a joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” Thus, like to some vegetables, this conso-

lation is ever green, and preserves its verdure in the winter of adversity. Nay, it fades not at the gate; no, nor in that dreary soil, the valley of death; but attends the soul till it is transplanted into that better country, "where there is fulness of joy at God's right hand for evermore." I now go on,

To consider the grounds of this consolation. And it is founded upon "two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie." The two things here referred to, are the promise and oath of God, both which were made to Abraham, when the covenant of grace was revealed to him. The promise is often upon record; and you will see the nature of the oath, Gen. xxii. 15—18. "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." And it is plain from the apostle's reasoning upon this subject, that the promise made to Abraham was not limited to his person, but extends to all his believing seed, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. Every humble soul who has fled for refuge to Christ, is an heir of the promise; has the same ground of consolation; the same security of being saved that Abraham had. And that,

1. From the promise of God. For "he is not man that he should lie." The best of men, though they have no guile, are mutable or weak; but with God there is "no variableness nor shadow of turning." And having promised, he is able also to perform. His promise conveys a right to the creature, and gives a claim upon his fidelity and power; but he cannot dishonour these his perfections, for that would be denying himself. Hence his justice, as well as truth and mercy, are concerned to pardon the believing penitent. "He is faithful and just to forgive them," says the apostle John. Hence he is engaged, when he has freely given grace, that he will give more to the careful improver of it; and that where the labour of love, and patience of hope in his service, are conspicuous in any, the reward of grace should be in proportion great.

With respect to these and such like promises, and every gift of his love, he will never recall them. They are all

“without repentance.” In Christ they have their stability. In him they are “yea and amen, to the praise and glory of God.” The faults and follies of his people, though well known to him, did not prevent his giving them promises of grace and glory; nor can their miscarriages obstruct the accomplishment of them in their due time and order.

What strong consolation is here to such as have taken hold of his covenant! “It shall be as the waters of Noah,” says God. The sins of men can no more utterly cancel it, than they can open the windows of heaven, and break up the fountains of the deep, to bring on a second deluge. It is true, he “may be angry for a moment, and in a little wrath hide his face;” but “his kindness” to the heirs of promise “is everlasting, his faithfulness shall not fail.”

2. Another ground and source of consolation to believers is the oath of God. Among men, an oath is the greatest security that can be given. And if we believe them when they swear, much more may such a testimony emitted by God be depended upon. For when He swears, he does it by himself. He pledges, as it were, his Godhead; and is content (with reverence be it spoken) to forfeit his Deity, or be esteemed false, if he make not good what he has so promised. In this solemn manner he confirmed his covenant. In this manner he installed our Saviour in his priesthood; and assured him of a numerous seed to do him service. And having once sworn by his holiness, he will never recede from it: and, therefore, not one of them can be lost or perish. Here, then, their hearts, who have fled to him for refuge, may rest, that the covenant which they have entered into is “ordered in all things and sure;” being ratified by the oath of the unchangeable I AM THAT I AM. This is strong consolation; and it proved so to David in his dying moments.

What an uncertainty were the salvation of his people, if every time they were unmindful of his covenant he cast them out of it! if upon every provocation of his justice he

recalled his mercy! For no saints, while on earth, have more of the divine life than Adam had when in perfect innocence; they are as much the objects of Satan's rage; and, though renewed in part, have a greater propensity to depart from God than Adam had. With these superior advantages, however, he was brought to ruin. What security then have they, or could there be any certainty of their salvation, if the matter depended upon themselves? Indeed none at all. But the immutable promise and oath of God are an immoveable and assured ground of hope. Especially when we add,

3. That this promise and oath of God is no other than the fruit and issue, the discovery and seal of that purpose and grace which was intended for believers in Christ before the world began. This eternal purpose of God could not take its rise from any worth or moral excellence in the creature, but from his own boundless mercy. For to the view of that all-comprehending Mind, to whom nothing is future, the human race were fallen, filthy, and ruined. But if the creature's unworthiness and guilt could not shut the fountain of everlasting love, or stop the issues of it, why should miscarriages and folly destroy the fruits of that love bestowed upon his people in time? If the riches of divine grace prevented the sinner, bringing him to repentance, will they not much more preserve him now when penitent, that he shall never perish? If such favour was shown him when wicked, as to slay the enmity, and to give him a filial loving heart; now that he is a son, now that he has a spirit to bewail his backslidings, and cause him to return, will an heavenly Father cast him off for ever? That be far from God. This is no other than the apostle's reasoning upon the subject. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed," Rom. iv. 16. Alas! if our being justified and saved could not be attained to but by our own obedience and stability, the guilt and inseparable weakness of our nature would frustrate both. But as the purpose of bestowing these has originated from grace, or

the purest good-will, this secures the accomplishment of them.

Thus, with regard to these eternal designs of mercy, God is of one mind—the same yesterday, this day, and for ever. And what is it that should turn him? The objects of his electing love, when chosen from eternity, were well known to him, and what they would be after they were effectually called by his grace. To him nothing new could fall out in their character or conduct, to make him retract. And therefore, without blaspheming him as fickle, no reason can be assigned why he should not fulfil his counsel, by fulfilling in them all the good pleasure of his goodness—the work of faith, and the work of sanctification too—till he bring them to glory.

It has been warmly urged against this doctrine, and the preaching of it, that it is of dangerous consequence, as it tends to licentiousness, or at least encourages sloth and presumption. For some will say: 'If our salvation be thus of free grace only, let us leave it there, and be no more solicitous about the matter; the purpose of God will certainly take effect.' No doubt such pernicious conclusions have been drawn by some; and so the best things may be abused—the bounties of providence, yea, and the blessings of the glorious gospel. The one has been the fuel of lust and luxury,—the other, the savour of death unto the death of many; but it were absurd to say, that therefore mankind ought to be deprived of both. Just so, it is evidently the will of God that the heirs of promise should have strong consolation. To this end he has assured them of the immutability of his counsel, and that his kindness shall never depart from them. But if the ignorant or presumptuous shall pervert this to their hurt, how iniquitous would it be to deny his own people the comfort of it?

After all, there is no just ground to aver that this doctrine has a tendency to promote security and sloth. To argue from the being and influence of grace in the soul, to the indulgence of sin in the life, is inconsequential and

fallacious. The great apostle of the Gentiles thought so: "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? For he that is dead is freed from sin," Rom. vi. 2, 7. And this is remarkably verified in the apostle's character. What mere man had larger measures of grace than he? Who ever was more assured of his interest in the unchangeable love of God? Was he therefore slothful or licentious? The reverse is true. Never was any man more afraid to sin, more abundant in the labour of love, and forward to perfection. Thus the life of God in the soul of man, and the vigorous hope of the future life of glory, instead of being dormant, are active principles; a mighty support under sufferings, and animation in the service of God. It remains now to make a few reflections.

I. How happy may the Christian be, and how peaceful and pleasant his passage through this world, even amidst the changes and calamities of it! These ills, it is true, are many, and to mortal man unavoidable. Many within himself from remaining darkness, depravity, folly, and misconduct; from the world around him, the wickedness and misery of which are so prevailing and fatal; and from Satan the god of this world. Such, it is confessed, is the situation of the heirs of promise, while dwelling here in cottages of clay; and yet from that character, and the inseparable privileges of it, they may have strong consolation. Consolation from the new covenant embraced by them, for it is everlasting; from its Mediator, in whom is abundance of pardoning mercy, sufficiency of grace, and immutable constancy in his love; from the great and precious promises of it, these wells of salvation, out of which at all times they may draw water with joy; and from the ways of wisdom wherein they are ordered to walk, all which ways are pleasantness and peace.

In fine; many ages before the coming of Christ, Jehovah did swear that these heirs of promise should be blessed in him. It is therefore an irreversible deed. "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so

have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, and rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, nor the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee," Isa. liv. 9, 10.

II. Let the heirs of promise be persuaded to suck at these breasts of consolation, that their joy may be full,—God is abundantly willing that it should be so. Why else has he been so liberal in the overflowing discoveries of his love?—He has made known his gracious purpose to you,—he has promised,—he has sworn. To accomplish these three, he has effectually called you by his grace; and would you have more for the stability of your faith and hope? Wherefore "lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees." Refreshed with these consolations, as a giant is with wine, improve them to a growing conformity to Christ, and persevering alacrity in his service. Often survey the treasures of his holy covenant,—where you have his blood to redeem, and his Spirit to renew,—his peace to comfort you here, his glory to crown you hereafter. O be mindful of that covenant, and of his most just commandments to obey them. Walk circumspectly in that path of pleasantness and peace. In that road you may go on rejoicing. Turn aside from it, and you wound your peace, and may walk in darkness, doubt, and uncertainty to the grave.

Suffer me to conclude with a second and public intimation, that these consolations belong only to mourners in Zion,—to those who have made the Lord's Christ their refuge,—who have sought his face with their whole heart, and value his favour above their chief earthly joy. And is there no word of consolation to others? Yes; we preach the glad tidings of salvation to all. Let the thoughtless and secure, the hypocrite and profane, follow the course prescribed in the text, and they too shall share in the joys of that salvation. If this is not thy supreme concern, thou mayest have presumption, but art really without hope. While asleep in a dream of happiness, thy way is dark and

slippery, and the angel of the Lord pursues thee close behind; and for thee is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. Instead of consolation, many sorrows shall be to thee, for despising the Redeemer's grace, who often would have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldest not. Such will be the portion of their cup, who make not the most High their refuge. "Now, our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, who hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work," 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.

SERMON V.

SINGULAR PIETY IN DEGENERATE TIMES DEAR TO GOD.

REV. iii. 4.—“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”

THESE words are part of an epistle composed, as it were, by our Lord himself, to be delivered by the hand of John, to one of the seven churches of Lesser Asia. She had a reputation, in that part of the world, for piety, and a pure profession; but, in his account, who judgeth not as man does, there was much more of the appearance than the reality of it: for he had not found her works perfect before him. A variety of wise and necessary counsels is given by the affectionate Redeemer, in order to her recovery; and given with particular warmth, because further progress in her present declining state would make her case irrecoverable, and soon to terminate in her ruin. Not that her degeneracy was universal: No. Amidst the prevailing corruption in that church, there were some living examples of the power of religion; some who were an ornament to the Christian name; the salt of the society; and as lights shining in that dark place. Addressing the angel or pastor of this church, “Thou hast a few names,” says our Lord, “even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”—In these words, let me call your attention,

I. To the low and decayed state of religion, as it is described in them. “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis.”

II. To the character of those who were not involved

in the reproachful and common degeneracy. "They have not defiled their garments."

III. To the reward of this singular piety, and the reason assigned for it. "They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."

I. Let us take a view of the decayed state of religion in this church, as it is expressed here: "Thou hast a FEW names even in Sardis." This great town was the metropolis, and royal seat of the kings of Lydia. It was crowded with inhabitants, stored with wealth and riches; and in these was little inferior to Babylon itself. There our blessed Lord had some names, or persons; for so the word *names* must be understood here, as in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chap. i. 15. "The number of the names," or disciples of Christ, "were about an hundred and twenty." In this populous town of Sardis, while many professing godliness denied its power, he had an handful of chosen, called, and faithful ones. Just as good seed, though sown in a barren soil, and backward season, does not wholly rot and perish; so there is ground to believe, that the gospel is not sent, and continued with a people altogether without fruit: though with regard to the quantity, the difference is great, in different places. At Corinth, the gospel did wonders; and rode as it were in triumph. At Athens, the renowned seat of learning and arts, the harvest was very small. And that seems to have been the case at Sardis. Christ had but a few names there.—More particularly, I would observe,

1. That this expression in the text, "Thou hast a few names," and similar passages of holy scripture, would lead one to think, that the number of those who are come to years is comparatively small, to whom the gospel is the savour of life, to their eternal life. Let none be offended at the remark, imputing it to rashness, or a malevolent spirit. Speaking upon this subject, God is witness, I can adopt the words of Joab upon another occasion: "The Lord God add unto his people, how many soever they be, an hundred-fold." It is true, that when gathered from north,

south, east, and west, and brought home to glory, they will be a vast assembly, a multitude which no man can number: but unequal to the miserable crowd who choose their own devices, and perish. How else shall we understand our Saviour in the seventh chapter of Matth. 13th and 14th verses? How decisive is the judgment of unerring wisdom and omniscience upon this head? That the broad way to destruction is crowded, while the path of life is found out, and trodden by few? To confine this sentence to the age and unsuccessfulness of our Saviour's personal ministry, is without foundation in the context; nor will the history of the Christian church, and daily observation, authorize such a gloss.

Not to speak of these parts of the world, where the whole system of the gospel doctrine, worship, and morals, are grossly corrupted, look to these places where the profession is more pure, how many have openly revolted from the faith, and deny the Lord that bought them? What swarms do we see of profane, dishonouring his name, or polluting his sabbath? How numerous are the proficient in the science and practice of fraud? Not of the lower class of mankind only, but among higher ranks, how many figure away by means most corrupting and deceitful, or oppressive and violent, while others are living in malice and envy, fired with revenge, or pursuing sensual and impure gratifications?

Add to these, the many who have the name to live, as Christ says of this church in Sardis, and are dead. They have the garb of saints, but are destitute of the divine life, in the principles and exercises of it. By profession they are candidates for heaven, but the present world is their god. Let these denominations withdraw from the tents of the genuine children of God; let them repair to their respective standards. And, upon comparing them with the remnant of a very different character, what will candour, what will charity itself say? Will it not be ready to pronounce of court and country, of populous cities, and

the thinly inhabited, that there are few names in them belonging to Christ.

2. Though few, yet in the worst of times, and in places where impiety did abound, he has always had *some names*, So it has been from the beginning, and shall be to the end of the world. In the infancy and morning of it, when all flesh had corrupted their way, there was an Enoch who walked with God, and a Noah, a preacher of righteousness to a wicked and ungodly generation. In some future ages, when irreligion and iniquity were established by law, we find not only a prophet of the Lord inflexibly faithful, but seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. In the close of the old testament dispensation, when religion, and the sincere professors of it, were insulted with scorn and blasphemy, we read that then there were some who feared the Lord, and spake often one to another, to their mutual stability and comfort in his holy ways.

With respect to new testament times, our Lord Jesus, as well as his forerunner, came in the way of righteousness, "and his own," we are told, "received him not." But though he was rejected by the Pharisees, by the doctors of law, and the body of that people, yet publicans and harlots believed on him. Nay, in future periods of the Christian church, when the grossest darkness and idolatry prevailed, he had his witnesses, though few, who prophesied in sackcloth, and held fast his testimony. And even at this present time, I trust that we may adopt the words of the apostle, that "there is a remnant according to the election of grace;" and that the Lord hath left us a seed. Nor will a seed to do him service utterly fail, while sun and moon endure. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto

I sent it," Isa. lv. 10, 11.—Upon this branch of the subject, let me observe once more,

3. That singular piety, and avowed attachment to religion in a time of abounding wickedness, has ever been dear to God, and distinguished with peculiar marks of regard from him. As such a public dissent from general corruptions argues a fervent love to God, and is no less than pleading his cause; this zeal for his name never did, nor shall pass unnoticed by him. "Them that honour me," says God, "I will honour." And how faithfully he has kept to this, may be learned, in some measure, from the examples already mentioned, and from others recorded in holy writ. What eminent exceptions from the common laws of mortality were Enoch and Elias? when God took the one that he did not see death, and the other was translated from earth to heaven in a fiery chariot. In the universal destruction of the human race, how marvellously kind was Noah's preservation? What miracles of power and mercy were wrought in favour of the Hebrew youth, and his faithful fellow-captives? They were constant enough to keep to the worship of their God, against the royal command to fall down before an idol. They feared not the wrath of a haughty enraged monarch, nor all the methods of cruelty that he could devise. As the recompense of this faith and fortitude, the hungry lions lay aside their rage, and are harmless as lambs; the flaming furnace forgets to burn: for "an hair of their head was not singed, nor had the smell of fire passed upon them." And the few names in the text, are spoken of by our Saviour, you see, with complacency and delight. Such is his respect for distinguished piety, even in this life. But how great is the goodness which he has laid up for them in the life to come? "They shall be mine," saith the Lord, "in that day when I make up my jewels."—I now proceed,

II. To the description or character of these few names, or persons, honourably pointed at in the text. It is said, That they had not "defiled their garments." This figurative way of speaking is usual with the inspired writers;

and frequently occurs in this mysterious book. As sin in scripture is expressed by nakedness, to signify the shame and danger to which it exposes us; on the other hand, the righteousness of Christ, holy principles, and dispositions of heart, exemplified in the life, are set forth under the notion of a garment. What clothes are to the body, that are these to the soul; they are its ornament and defence.—And the not defiling their garments may imply,

1. That in their lives they were blameless and irreproachable. This is the lowest, though an essential part of their character. As the sons of God, they were without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. They were watchful to preserve their holy profession unstained, and not to give just cause to any to revile it. They were not led away with prevailing errors; nor made shipwreck either of their faith or a good conscience, but happily escaped the corruptions with which many in that church were tainted; not only gross and flagrant corruptions, but secret and spiritual wickedness, to which God and conscience alone are privy.

Thus were they undefiled in the way, and from the nature of their heavenly birth, could not love, or live in sin. In few words: They defiled not the truths of Jesus, by denying, or adulterating them; nor their hearts, by giving them up to be, as it were, a cage of unclean birds. They defiled not their shining profession with the works of darkness; their lips with filthy communication; nor their hands with violence or fraud. In these deep and dirty paths trodden by many, they did not walk. If, through unwatchfulness, they stumbled into any of them; like a person neatly dressed, who has fallen into the mire, their clothes, to speak in the language of Job, did abhor them; and they themselves could not be at rest, till they were washed and made clean.

2. Though their character here is described in negative terms, yet a great deal more is intended; viz. that they not only had the grace of God in truth, but had made considerable progress in it. In which respect, they were as

lights shining in a dark place. They were not only pure from such filthiness of flesh and spirit, as is inconsistent with adoption; but they were well advanced in the scale of sanctity, and were perfecting holiness in the fear of God. They were not only without offence; but, as is said of the Christians at Philippi, they were filled with the fruits of righteousness. Heavenly light and love, meekness and humility, patience, self-denial, and the like, were graces deeply seated in the soul; the same with the embroideries spoken of in Psalm xlv. which make the king's daughter all glorious within; and give a lustre to their profession likewise. Such seem to have been the complexion, and the ornaments of the hidden man of their heart, whom our Saviour applauds for not having defiled their garments. On which account, though the world know them not, in his sight they are honourable; more excellent than their neighbour; and their end is according to their works.—Which brings me,

III. To consider the reward of eminent piety in degenerate and declining times promised here, with the reason of it. "They shall walk with me in white," says our Lord, "for they are worthy." What regards he has expressed to the singularly good character, even in a present life, has been hinted already. The promise in our text chiefly respects, and shall have its completion in the world to come: there they shall walk with him in white, intimating,

1. The peculiar honours to be conferred upon them in the life to come. As kings and conquerors of old were dressed in white robes, to point out their high rank and worth; so those worthies who were wedded to the cause of God and religion, who dared to espouse it openly, when generally reproached, and followed by few, shall be raised in the coming world to now unknown dignity and renown. Though the world knew not their value in this present life, they had a name, which, with the wise and good, will be savoury to latest ages. But in the celestial state, their fame for unshaken fidelity and fervent love, will reach

through all its realms. As their amiable graces here, so there, the superior lustre of their robes will distinguish them in that blessed assembly. These are they, it will be said, who were bold enough to encounter the terrors, to bear the cruel mockings, and resist the ensnaring solicitations of a militant state; and all this, from the love which they bore to Jesus. He likewise will confess them before his Father, and his holy angels, and wipe off every aspersion which in this world darkened their real excellence. He will put the palm of victory into their hands, and set them down as conquerors with himself upon his throne; even as he also overcame, and was set down upon his Father's throne.

2. This figurative expression of walking with him in white, points out the analogy and near alliance between the reward and their real character. While in this life, it is said of them, that they defiled not their garments; suitably to this, in the life to come, they shall walk with him in white: the last of these being an improvement, or a more exalted degree of the other. In this life, the reigning power and pollution of sin was taken away; in the other, the very being of it will be destroyed. Here, purity of heart was their great aim and study; there it will be in its perfection, and their unfading glory. Notwithstanding their present brightness and beauty, like the natural sun, they have their spots while they are on earth; but hereafter, they shall be introduced to the presence of his glory, without spot and blemish, or any such thing. That image of God which is now drawn upon the soul in fainter colours, will then be finished, and seen in its utmost splendour. Can finite mind conceive, or the angel's tongue express, what a source of pure and lasting delight this must be? When they that had lien among the pots, disfigured with infirmities, reproach, and suffering, shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their heavenly Father. What a languid emblem of this was Mordecai's unexpected promotion? Or that of Joseph, when he exchanged the dark and joyless dungeon, his mean and coarse apparel, for the

royal ring, and vesture of fine linen, the gold chain about his neck, and for that of being next to Pharaoh in the kingdom? This, unutterably more than this, shall be done to those of singular and eminent piety, which God delights to honour.—The reason is assigned;

3. “For they are worthy.” To interpret this, as if we could, properly speaking, merit with our Maker, is very absurd. The condition of a creature who owes its all to him, absolutely forbids such a thought. It is, indeed, becoming his excellent nature, it is consonant to his gracious promise, not to forget the labour of love, or patience of any in his service. But it is true, at the same time, that though we were complete in doing the whole will of God, and had endured the most grievous sufferings for his sake, these would not be worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. The reward, therefore, cannot be challenged as a debt; for it is of grace, and was procured by a price of infinite value. Those, then, who have not defiled their garments are worthy, as they only are meet to receive, and capable of such exalted felicity.—It remains to review, and conclude this discourse with a few reflections.

1. Let it not be thought any good objection against the importance and beauty of religion, that few experience its sacred power, and practise it. The nature and properties of real piety are immutable as God himself. They are not so pliable as to bend to the opinions of a giddy prejudiced world. If there is somewhat superlatively amiable in religion, no majority of voices will render it deformed; no, not the voices of the wise and disputers of this world. Nor is the road to glory, honour, and immortality, less honourable or safe, that few walk in it. And yet there is reason to fear, that this is a prejudice that does unspeakable mischief; such is the influence of false modesty, and the strong propensity in human nature to imitate: that general usage, and prevailing custom is, with many, their governing principle and rule. Within the circle of their acquaintance, though extensive, they see but few who are in

good earnest about religion; and why, think they, should we be more solicitous than the many? If we give in to some indulgences, they are fashionable ones. And if this will not justify altogether, they hope at least, that it will go far to excuse them. As if vice were divested of its ugliness, when followed by thousands; and abominable only when it is practised by a very small number; than which nothing is more absurd. For if a loose and wicked life in two or three of the human kind, would make them to appear as misshapen monsters, and be justly abhorred; how is it possible, that a numerous society of such odious forms could have any comeliness or beauty!

2. The more rarely that this character in the text is to be met with, the more earnest, my brethren, be you to attain and excel in it. Be persuaded to watch and be sober, to give yourselves to prayer, and keep your garments clean. In order to this, the heart must be alienated from sin, the abominable thing which God hates; from secret and formerly beloved sins. It will not constitute this pure and holy character, that we abstain from the external commission of them, unless there be a settled antipathy at all sin, and a hatred of the garments spotted with the flesh.

Keep thy heart, therefore, diligently, or with all keeping; and make a covenant with thine eyes. Set a watch at the door of thy lips; and shut thine ear to the language of the lewd and profane. Be not the companion of fools. If their society once become thy choice and delight, thy purity is well nigh gone. Dip very sparingly into the modern compositions of the pleasurable kind. Too many of them have a polluting influence, and grossly violate the rules of decency, and christian morals. Nor are you in less danger of defiling your garments, from frequenting the gay and fashionable assemblies of the age; from which, I believe, few return with the same innocence, the same favourable regard to religion and virtue, with which they first went there.

Let me beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God,

that in these things, though current by the authority of custom, you be not conformed to the world. Did your time permit me to offer motives, a multitude of them pour in on every hand. I shall only remind you, that the religion which you profess is pure and undefiled: That the Saviour in whom you believe was himself separated from sinners: that he came to destroy the works of the devil; and particularly these more artful depths of Satan. Can you consistently support them? And suffer me once more, to lead your thoughts to the distinguishing reward promised here: "They shall walk with me in white," says the faithful Witness. And can you think, for the pleasures of sin, or the applause of fools, to forego such a public testimony of esteem from such a judge, and all the honours of the eternal world?

SERMON VI.

HEAVEN NOT THE INHERITANCE OF ALL MEN.

1 COR. vi. 9.—“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived.”

It is surprising to see what slight impression divine truths make upon the mind of man; how little they are regarded by many, though of the greatest moment; and how injudicious we are in the application of them. Sloth, inattention, presumption, and self-deceit, are reigning diseases; and that, not among the ignorant and unlearned only, but among professors of Christianity, who would be thought more discerning people. Many even of these either mistake the word of God, or their own character, when examined by that test; and, though they have good reason to believe that they are the children of the devil, yet fondly conclude that they are sons and daughters of the Almighty, and therefore have hope of the heavenly inheritance. By some piece of fallacy or other, they flatter themselves with the prospect of living with God in heaven, though they lived without him on earth; of being satisfied with his likeness there, though here they could not think of him with pleasure, nor did like to retain him in their knowledge.

Blessed God, undeceive them. What inconsistency and delusion is this, that the unrighteous in heart and life should expect the righteous man's reward! How much wiser in their generation are the children of this world! Where is the husbandman who would look for a crop of

wheat or barley, if he had sown thorns or thistle seed? Where is the merchant who would venture his goods over sea in a shattered and leaking vessel, in hope of a gainful return? But creatures endowed with reason, and hastening to eternity, act more foolishly in everlasting concerns. They flatter themselves in their own blinded eye, till their iniquity is found to be hateful, and their ruin remediless. To prevent this fatal mistake is the purpose of those words that I have read, and my design in reading them; which I shall first explain, and then propose the method of the following discourse from them.

“Know ye not,” says the apostle, “that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived.” By ‘unrighteous’ here I understand, not only the unjust man, whose crooked disposition leads him to defraud and wrong his neighbour; but the irreligious and immoral character, reigning sin, and latent hypocrisy in the heart, or habitual wickedness in the life. It denotes an unprincipled heart, destitute of that truth and purity which are the upright stature of the soul, and its participation of a divine nature. In this latitude it is frequently used in holy scripture: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts,” Isa. lv. 7;—so that the following particular characters, in the ninth and tenth verses, may be understood as included in this general one, “the unrighteous.”

Concerning such, the apostle’s question implies a positive assertion, that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Sometimes ‘the kingdom of God’ signifies the gospel dispensation: “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you;” to wit, the gospel kingdom which they had rejected, Matt. xxi. 43. Sometimes by ‘the kingdom of God’ is meant, the happy influence and effects of it upon the souls of men: “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,” Rom. xiv. 17; or, these are the blessed fruits of the gospel, where it comes with power. Last of all, it is to be understood of the state of future happiness and

glory, towards which good men are in motion, as their eternal rest. And in that sense I understand it here.

And it is called 'the kingdom of God,' to express the majesty and splendour, the excellent laws and order that are established in it. This kingdom the unrighteous cannot inherit. The apostle's query, and manner of speaking, "Know ye not?" says he, implies a peremptory denial, the impossibility of the thing; and, at the same time, that what he asserts of the unrighteous is so evident as cannot well be mistaken. Though many, alas! are willingly ignorant of it, or act as if they were really so: and, therefore, he adds, "Be not deceived;"—as if he had said, 'Though it is plain, and will be acknowledged, that an impious or polluted sinner cannot be admitted into the undefiled inheritance; yet, such is the influence of self-love, and the deceived heart, that many hope to live with God in heaven, who live wickedly on earth: be upon your guard, therefore, against this fatal delusion.' From these words I propose,

I. To open more fully the character of the unrighteous.

II. The certainty of their being excluded the kingdom of God.

III. To inquire into the import of the apostle's question and exhortation upon this subject.

Lastly, Some improvement shall conclude the whole.

I. To return to the character of the unrighteous.

1. By the 'unrighteous' here we are not to understand such as are wholly innocent, and below perfection. In this latitude it would comprehend the whole race of Adam, him only excepted who did no sin, the spotless Lamb of God. For if all were the unrighteous spoken of here, save the perfectly innocent, there could not be such a thing as a righteous man on earth, because there is not a man that liveth here and sinneth not. And were that the meaning of the word 'unrighteous,' we might well ask, as the disciples did on another occasion, "Lord, who then can be saved?" But it is not being perfectly free from sin that distinguishes between the unrighteous and righteous man.

Both have sin dwelling in them, but in very different respects. The one is dead to it, in the other it is alive,—in the one it is mortified and weak, the old man which is daily becoming more feeble—in the other sin reigns, and is obeyed. The saint and the sinner have flesh in them; but the last of these makes provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts and desires thereof; the former crucifies these corrupt affections, and denies the gratification of them.

2. By the 'unrighteous' I understand one who has no experience of the power of godliness, though he has the form. He is without a gospel impression and seal upon his heart, though he makes an external profession of it. As he was at first born of the flesh, he is flesh still, and does not partake of a divine nature. He is devoid of that collection of graces which constitute the new creature, and are wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God. Though he has learned some things of God and Christ by early education, and the instruction of riper years, he has not received the truth in love, nor likes to retain it in his knowledge. In a word, if at any time he serves God, it is as if he served him not. And no wonder:—with what reverence or pleasure can he serve one whom he neither fears nor loves? And, as to the message of redemption by Jesus Christ, he never saw a beauty or suitableness in it why it should be welcomed or submitted to by him.

3. The unrighteous man is one under the power and prevalence of evil habits, and not yet washed from his old sins; and, therefore, you see that the change wrought upon some of the Corinthians from that deplorable condition, is expressed by their being washed and sanctified; intimating, that their former state was pollution and impurity, that their hearts and consciences, as well as their lives, were defiled with sin.

The unrighteous man has no relish or savour of what is spiritual and divine. He is under the dominion of sense, minding earthly things only. He breathes the spirit of the world, and the things of it are his god. Possessed of these, he will call upon his soul to take ease, to eat, drink, and

be merry. But, if by any disaster he is deprived of them, his heart sinks in him like a stone. "He is carnal, sold under sin," says the Holy Ghost; yea, "a lover of pleasures," guilty contaminating pleasures, "more than of God." His hope and fear, joy and sorrow, aversion and delight, are excited chiefly by worldly considerations; for his affections are set on things of the earth, and not on things that are above. Once more,

4. As his spirit and temper, so the tenor of his life and conduct is according to the course of this world. It is no rule of life with him to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to pay a sacred regard to the great duties of piety, judgment, mercy, and faith. What the Scripture calls the accurate or circumspect walk, is, in his account, preciseness and singularity. Restraints of that kind he loves not, nor will he come under them. So much of external religion as is convenient, and that thwarts not his worldly lusts, he can submit to, though from no love to the law-giver and his laws. When these interfere with his prevailing inclinations and earthly pursuits, divine authority is set aside, and the laws of God are cast behind his back. Thus the unrighteous walk in the sight of their eyes, and ways of their own hearts; saying of their actions, as sinners are spoken of with respect to their tongues, "These are our own, who is Lord over us?"

I do not mean that every unregenerate sinner is openly profane, or that he wallows in the vices mentioned in the context. No. Some men's sins go beforehand unto judgment; such carry their character written as it were in their forehead. But there are others, who, though more disguised, are also the unrighteous spoken of here. Not only the gross idolater who worships graven images, but he who is enslaved to covetousness; which inspiration pronounces to be idolatry. Not only the extortioner and the thief, but he who allows himself to defraud and lie for gain. Not only the open railer, but he who receives an ill report of his neighbour with joy, and secretly spreads it with care. Not only they who commit such things are the

unrighteous who shall not inherit the kingdom of God, but such as take pleasure in those that do them. This is some view of the character of the unrighteous, and a black one it is. Let us next inquire what their end shall be; which brings us,

II. To show the certainty of their being excluded the kingdom of God: "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God," says the apostle. They have no title or claim, no disposition and fitness for it. To set this matter in a clearer light, it may not be amiss to give some short account of this kingdom, from which the unrighteous are excluded. By this kingdom I understand the happiness and glory of a future state. In Scripture, these are set forth by a great variety of figures; all which fall very far short of the things described by them. But, to use as great plainness of speech as the subject will admit of, the happiness of the heirs of this kingdom will consist in seeing God, in being like him, and satisfied with that likeness; in a clear apprehension of his excellencies, the councils of manifold wisdom, and unsearchable riches of divine grace in Jesus Christ.

Distinct views of these mysteries in God's own light, to the enlarged mind, will marvellously transform, and transport to adoration, wonder, joy, and praise; which will be heightened from the united efforts of a numberless crowd, employed with inconceivable ardour in the same sublime exercises. "His servants shall serve him," says the beloved disciple, "and they shall see his face," Rev. xxii. 4. Never with a frown upon it, as was the case sometimes here on earth, but in its unveiled beauty, and with a constant smile. How great the happiness must be, that will flow from these, and other sources which might be named, is unutterable. After the most profound investigation, another day must declare its greatness. Glorious things are said in the inspired writings of this kingdom of God, but still it is a glory to be revealed. I now proceed to show whence it is so certain that the unrighteous shall not inherit this kingdom.

1. They have no right or title to it. The heavenly kingdom is, to Adam's progeny, a forfeited inheritance, and what by law they have no claim to. It is, indeed, the purchase of the Redeemer, and bought with the price of his blood. If any of them, therefore, have obtained a title, they must have got it by grant or promise from him. But is there any such grant to the unrighteous in all the charter of his kingdom, I mean in the gospel? Has he anywhere promised the heavenly inheritance to sinners of that character? Verily no. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life,"—he has it in the seed and sure earnest. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;" and "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the city," Rev. xxii. 14.

But unto the unrighteous we may say, What have they to do to lay claim to these promises? They belong to persons of another spirit. The same word of God, which makes over his kingdom to the one, excludes the other for ever from it. "Verily, I say unto you"—they are the words of the faithful Witness—"except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven," Matt. v. 20. To the same purpose, after giving a long list of workers of iniquity, the apostle concludes of them all: "Of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God," Gal. v. 21. To name no more: "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie," Rev. xxi. 7.

And now, let me ask the presumptuous sinner, were these things written in vain? or are they mere bugbears to alarm where there is no danger? Far from it, my brethren. As our first and rebellious parents could not re-enter paradise, or taste of the tree of life, while the flaming sword was placed there; neither shall the un-

righteous inherit the kingdom of God, unless his word can be broken, or his power and faithfulness fail.

2. They have no disposition and fitness for that kingdom. The happiness of any living thing depends upon a suitableness or proportion between the faculty and object to be enjoyed. Where this suitableness is not, there can be no real satisfaction. Hence it is that the different tribes of animals pursue those enjoyments only to which their various natures are adapted. With respect to man, it is evident from our frame, that we are designed for society with the intelligent creation, and its glorious Author. Our happiness, therefore, must arise from an harmony of temper, a similitude of sentiment and disposition to those with whom we converse. How, then, can two walk together in a friendly manner, if they are not thus agreed? But what agreement is there between light and darkness, a defiled soul and an holy God?—between a spirit deeply leavened with malice or envy, and a Being who is love itself?—between a kingdom of the most perfect order, peace, and harmony, and a sinner whose impetuous passions and desires make him like the troubled sea, that he cannot rest?

One would think that this reasoning, with the consequences of it, were obvious. But many are slow of understanding, and unwise. It is astonishing to observe their inconsistency, and how contradictory they are in their wishes. They seem to have an earnest desire for heaven, and, at the same time, a settled dislike of holiness, their only meetness for it; which is as if a man should desire to see without eyes; or that, when he sows one kind of seed, God would make it bring forth a very different grain. Know ye not that this kingdom of God consists in righteousness? How then can the unrighteous inherit the same? It is not the nature and constitution of God only, but thine own unhallowed nature, which makes it impossible. And must he lay aside that purity wherein he is glorious, because thou wilt not be sanctified to become like him? Must the mountains be removed for thy sake,

and an order of things, fixed with perfect wisdom, be overturned? Deluded soul! has God established it? Then surely it will stand, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" or, as it is in the text, "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." I go on,

III. To inquire into the import of the apostle's manner of speaking upon this subject: "Know ye not," says he, "that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" To which he adds, "Be not deceived." Intimating,

1. That the truth delivered in this passage is as plain as it is important,—level to the weakest capacity,—and could not well be called in question, at least among Christians. "Know ye not?" says the apostle. His way of speaking is an appeal to common sense. He submits the point to the judgment of those to whom he writes, in confidence that it would decide in favour of his assertion. Words cannot be plainer than those made use of here by inspiration, and in many other places of holy writ—shutting the entry to the kingdom of God upon the unrighteous. The light of nature too, is an advocate for this doctrine. For if a future state is admitted, and an essential difference between holiness and sin, virtue and vice,—the condition of good and bad men in the coming world must be different likewise,—unless the righteous God were altogether regardless of both, which is blasphemously absurd.

But some will be apt to say, to what purpose is all this? Why go about to prove what no one will deny? Had the apostle interrogated us as he did the Corinthians, we would have readily answered, that we did know what he asserted of the unrighteous, and believed it likewise. Such, no doubt, might be your reply. At the same time, there is a wide difference between our unfeignedly believing divine truths, and thinking that we do believe them. But if your belief has not a corresponding influence upon your practice, it is the same thing, as to any good purpose, as if we had no knowledge and faith of them at all.

This is the rule by which we judge of the sincerity of

our belief in all other cases. Would a distressed patient be thought to believe or trust his physician, if he refused to follow his advice, or to use the medicines prescribed by him? I suppose not. The application of this is easy. In secular affairs men would be thought ridiculous to act contrary to their professed belief; in eternal concerns only, they are not ashamed to contradict it. They know and profess to believe, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, and yet make a trade of unrighteousness and sin. This is a very strange, but a melancholy truth. Which leads me to observe,

2. That plain, acknowledged, and momentous as the apostle's doctrine is, people are apt to impose upon themselves in the application of it. He did not doubt of its being known and acknowledged in the Corinthian church; and yet he immediately adds, "Be not deceived." And would to God that there were less ground for this caution. But, alas! the Lord knows that the thoughts and hopes of not a few, upon this subject, are vanity. Have you never heard of such a thing as the hope of the hypocrite, which will perish? Did not an unrighteous Balaam express his desire and expectation of dying the death of the righteous? Will not many of a high profession come to our Lord at the last day, putting in their several pleas for the kingdom of God, who notwithstanding will be rejected? In a word, is there not great reason to fear, that numbers, in every age, go down to the pit with a lie in their right hand? The fact will not be denied by the wise and observing—how it comes to be so is the question.

(1.) It may be owing to a fatal mistake about the nature of that righteousness which is absolutely necessary to make us meet for the kingdom of God; or, in other words, it may flow from thinking that we are righteous, when indeed we are not so. Such was the favourable, but false opinion, which the self-conceited Pharisee entertained of himself: "God, I thank thee," says he, "that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, and give tithes

of all that I possess," Luke xviii. 11, 12. Being free from the gross vices mentioned by him, and punctually performing some external duties, he concludes himself to be the favourite of God, and a hopeful candidate for heaven.

There is no reason to think that this Pharisee is the only person who has been blinded and ruined by this fallacy,—it has slain its thousands. Thou hast the outward form of religion, and art not openly immoral. It is well if it be so. But God knows thy heart; there may be wickedness enough there, to denominate thee the unrighteous who shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Is it not unrighteous, that, in thy mind and affections, thou art alienated from God,—that he is little in thy thoughts,—and thou seldom inquirest, saying, Where is God my Maker?—that thou art supplied from his bounty, but dost not thankfully acknowledge it,—and protected by his power, but dost not reverence it, hardening thy heart against his fear and love.

Is there no unrighteousness in thy indifference and dissatisfaction to the glad tidings of the gospel, to the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ?—in thy unbelief, and impenitence for sin that thou hast done?—in thy distrust of the promises of God, as if he were false or fickle?—and secret murmurs at the conduct of providence, with respect to thy circumstances in the world? If there is nothing of unrighteousness in all this, what is it that so richly deserves that appellation? Be not deceived; while these evils have the ascendant within thee, can they make thee meet for the kingdom of God? Verily no. Though thou got access there, that holy land would spue thee out.

(2.) There are others who pretend to rely upon the righteousness of Christ to introduce them to the kingdom of God,—though conscious of their unrighteous character, and continuing filthy still. Deadly deceit! It is true that God gave his Son to die for us, and that the Son gave his life and blood to be our ransom, and thus brought in an everlasting righteousness;—but does his obedience to the death supersede the necessity of our being born again,

repenting, and believing the gospel? Does it render these graces needless, or our salvation possible without them? Was he then so holy, to take away our obligation to be holy likewise? or was his love to God so ardent, to excuse us, though we are haters of him?

What monstrous absurdities are these, and gross abuse of gospel grace, thus to set Christ at variance with himself, —thus to divorce his death from the great end of it! How very different from this is the language of holy Scripture: “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” Titus ii. 14. To the same purpose it is said, that “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water, by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish,” Eph. v. 25—27.

It is now time to reflect a little upon what has been said.

1. We see the necessity of inculcating, with great plainness of speech, the capital doctrines of religion; and how much it is to be regretted that, even in these, though of the last importance, men can and will impose upon themselves. What is more readily acknowledged by Christians than the doctrine of future and eternal happiness in heaven, and that preparation for it is the one thing needful? and yet, is there any thing almost less regarded, or more wretchedly mistaken? Alas! are there not many who have sat long under the gospel, who have been dreaming, while God was revealing that glorious state? To others, the word of God is a reproach; and what is said of the concerns of their souls and eternity, affects them only as a tale that is told. They are warned, and in God’s great name too, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. And though these very men profess to believe this undeniable truth, yet they can flatter themselves with peace, and say, ‘There is hope,’ making lies their refuge.

2. Let us beware of the fond and foolish hope of inheriting the kingdom of God, while we have no meetness for it. I beseech you, brethren, attend to this word of exhortation: "Be not deceived." Study to know your real character, and what manner of spirit you are of. Sure I am, to be wholly in the dark about this, when so much depends on it, is very comfortless; and it is dangerous, without any scrutiny, to rest in security and presumption. Examine, therefore, and prove yourselves. It is a reproach to a candidate for heaven to be slothful or ignorant in this matter. If our title to an earthly fortune, or small legacy, were called in question, how strictly would we inquire into our rights? And can we find no leisure to examine how our hope of heaven is founded?

3. Let the unrighteous and unholy, misled by their deceived hearts, be prevailed upon to look forward to the issue of their present security, and to think of their dreadful disappointment at death, and the great day of the Lord; when they shall be cast down from the pinnacle of their imaginary hope, into the depth of endless despair. O how unfathomable the fall, and irrecoverable! Be persuaded to prevent this in the day of your merciful visitation; and say not, 'There is no hope.' A blacker catalogue of vile sinners than that after the text is scarcely to be found; but "where sin did abound, grace did much more abound." They were "washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." May not you obtain the like mercy and happy change?—his name and Spirit have still energy enough to effect it. In thy distress let thy cry come up before him, that thou mayest find mercy to pardon, grace to renew, and to help in time of need.

SERMON VII.

THE BLESSEDNESS AND CHARACTER OF JUSTIFIED PERSONS.

ROM. viii. 1.—“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

THESE words are the comfortable conclusion which the apostle draws from his former discourse upon justification by faith in Christ. In the preceding chapter he had complained heavily of the remains of sin; in this he glories that it shall not condemn him. In the one he mourns as a dove in the valley; here he is clothed with the garments of praise. Look to him in the seventh chapter, he resembles one engaged in a sore and doubtful conflict; here he boasts of victory. Such are the changes in the Christian's life. Just as in the natural day, at one time there is a serene sky, and shining sun; by and by these are overcast: and then, as in the mount of transfiguration when overshadowed with a cloud, the disciples of Christ are in fear. Amidst all these vicissitudes, however, one thing is certain, that though the peace which God has given may be interrupted, it shall not be utterly taken away. Thus it was with the apostle; after all his distress from indwelling sin, he concludes with assurance, that it shall not prove his ruin: “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

In which words we may observe the blessed privilege of a justified soul: “there is no condemnation to him.” There is none *now*; though formerly lying under it, when

impenitent and unbelieving. It is not said, that there is nothing in the justified person, or done by him, that deserves this condemning sentence. With respect to himself, the apostle had acknowledged, that there was a law in his members warring against the law of his mind. And, indeed, the whole generation of the righteous may adopt the words of the psalmist: "if thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, who, O Lord, could stand?" But being justified by faith, no condemning sentence shall go against them, to wit, from God. Often does their own heart rebuke them for their follies. Nay, even when innocent, they have been censured by an unkind world, and condemned to death, as having done what is worthy of it. So shall it not be with believers in the great day of final doom and decision. "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me," says Christ, "hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation," John v. 24.

Further, We see their character to whom this privilege does belong: they "are in Christ Jesus;" words which intimate that there is a strict and vital union between him and them. This is sometimes expressed by his being in them; and here, by their being in him. The same Spirit of heavenly light, and holy love dwelling in both, though in a different degree, and animating both.

Last of all, They are described by their conversation and course of life: they "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." I shall not stay to give all the acceptations of the word *flesh* in holy scripture. In this verse it signifies that corrupt nature in which we are born, derived to us from Adam, in whom all died. It chiefly consists in alienation of heart from God, inability, or rather aversion to what is spiritually good, with an habitual and prevailing propensity to sin. This old defiled nature is called *flesh* with great propriety; being propagated from one generation to another in the seed of flesh; exerting itself by our members which are carnal; and inflamed by sensible surrounding objects.

This nature does not reign in them who are in Christ

Jesus. Once indeed, it sat upon the throne of the heart, and gave law from thence; but now its authority is put down. And though sometimes it may usurp, and lead captive too, yet they will never own it as their sovereign, so as tamely to follow, and be led by it: No; they walk after the *Spirit*; which signifies, that divine and holy frame that is introduced upon the soul when born again, and made a new creature. The former old nature was from the first Adam, and is earthly and polluting; this divine principle is from the second Adam, who is a pure and quickening Spirit, and it powerfully inclines to walk in newness of life. Not but there is a continued conflict between those two in the soul during the present state; but if the renewed soul is betrayed by temptation into the service of the flesh, it can find no peace there. Whereas, it delights in the law of God after the inward man, and with pleasure walks in his ways. As the metaphor of walking, signifies a continued progressive motion; so they press forward and persevere.

The words being now explained, I propose to discourse from them in the following manner—To illustrate farther this privilege of no condemnation—Their character who have a title to it—And to conclude each of these with a few practical reflections.

I. With regard to the first of these, I would observe in general, that this condemnation is no other than the sentence of a righteous God, adjudging the sinner whom he has found guilty to the first and second death, which is comprehensive of every kind of woe.

This sentence the unbelieving and impenitent are liable to in life;—fall under at death;—and in the great day of the Lord.—The consideration of these particulars will contribute to set this great privilege in some degree of light.

1. Impenitent sinners are condemned at the bar of conscience. Every transgressor, especially under gospel light, is guilty to himself, or from his own conviction. Having committed what he knows to be sin, which is a transgres-

sion of the law, accusing thoughts arise in the soul, and a sentence within his own bosom is pronounced against him. This is truly the voice of God, and an indication of a future and more solemn reckoning. And though, by an obstinate course of sinning, in the righteous judgment of God, these rebukes may be smothered in security, and conscience become seared as with a hot iron, yet what is written by the finger of God there, will remain. And sometimes the awful verdict has been repeated in the sinner's ear; as the thunders at mount Sinai, so dreadfully distracting, as to embitter every comfort, break all his bones, and make him go quick down to hell. And no wonder; for if cast at the bar below, how will he stand before the dread tribunal above? "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than the heart, and knows all things."

2. The impenitent sinner is condemned in the hour of death. Then the former sentence will be repeated, and that in a more awful manner than ever conscience did in this life. Then the execution of the sentence will properly begin, by adjudging the body to the prison of the grave, and the forlorn soul to the deep; like the fallen angels, to be reserved in chains under darkness, to the judgment of the great day. Then that faithful monitor, whose mouth thou hast often stopped, will speak freely, justify God in thy condemnation, which will tear in pieces, when there is none to deliver. Then it will bring to mind the merciful days of thy visitation, the many tender calls of grace, and strivings of his Spirit with thee, and thy monstrous folly in resisting them all; which, though nothing more were inflicted, will be as the gall of asps within thee, or the worm that never dies.

And now the sentence is irrevocable. In this life there might have been an appeal from it; after death there is none. Many awakened souls, convinced of sin, have been accused and condemned at the bar of conscience; but by appealing to a mercy-seat, through faith in a Mediator, the sentence has been reversed, and a pardon issued forth, and sealed. But if judgment go against thee at the hour of

death, it will never be recalled. He that is filthy then, will be filthy still. No reclaiming bill, if I may speak so, will be admitted. No supplications will prevail, though offered with strong cries and tears.

3. The unrenewed and impenitent sinner will be condemned at the great assize, and general judgment of the world. Then what was formerly transacted in the court of conscience, and privately in the hour of death, will be publicly confirmed, and pronounced before a crowded assembly of angels and men. Need I enlarge upon this before a Christian auditory, who have so much said in their Bibles of the day of the Lord? Alas! we are slow of understanding. How feeble is the faith of the best! Without attempting to embellish, holy scripture represents, and thine eyes shall see the tremendous process conducted in some such form as this.

In a time of great security with our world, perhaps at midnight, the trump of God shall sound, and the dead arise. The Ancient of Days shall ascend the great white throne, and before him shall all nations be gathered. The books being opened, the law will accuse of many breaches of it; the gospel of a vile contempt of the remedy revealed there; and the conscience will so clearly attest the truth of both, that the sinner will be speechless. By this time his face will be turning pale, and his eyes failing him for fear of what is to follow. For if a Moses did quake and tremble at the delivery of the law, much more will the boldest sinner at the execution of it.

And now God will speak to him in wrath. How often did I warn thee in yonder world, to prepare for this day, and thou wouldest not? Hadst thou been informed of a thief who designed to break in upon thy house, thou wouldest have watched; thine immortal soul, it seems, was not worthy of so much care. Thoughtless wretch! Thine ear was always open to the call of thy lusts, and the solicitations of Satan; to me only it was deaf. Thy life has been a continued revolt from me; and now, what has been thy choice hitherto, shall be thy doom for ever. Depart

from me, thou cursed. Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

This is a short account of that condemnation of ungodly men, from which they that are in Christ Jesus are happily delivered: "there is no condemnation to them."

1. Even in this life they are justified by faith, and actually brought into a state of favour with God. Upon their unfeigned acceptance of the offered Saviour, they are made the righteousness of God in him, accepted in the Beloved, and pass from death unto life. Their pardon, when indeed they believe, passes the seals in heaven; though it is not perhaps so clearly recorded in the conscience, as that they can read it to their own comfort. Thus, it is no uncommon thing, that the tender and timorous conscience does impute sin, where God has freely forgiven it. Hence it is, that their peace is not without disquiet; their joy is mingled with heaviness; and they water their couch with their tears. At the same time, though they know it not, he is a God of peace to them; the remission which he has granted is irrevocable; and as soon may the distant points of east and west meet, as the guilt of their sins can return, which in his love and pity he has removed from them.

2. Their absolution from condemnation and wrath is clear and beyond all doubt when they go hence. Upon hearing that sentence, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," all anxiety is gone. Then the soul that was in bondage all its lifetime, through fear of death, from death finds its cure. Then former perplexing thoughts about their eternal state pass away, the darkness that hung over the mind evanishes, and the true light shineth; the light of God's countenance, which makes them exceeding glad.

3. And above all, their absolution will be ample and open in the day of the Lord; when the King shall say to them on the right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world." The Lord knows them that are his,

while in this present state, though they themselves have not the comfortable assurance of this relation. But then he will publicly own them as his friends, his jewels, and his treasure. What was only whispered in the ear formerly, shall then be proclaimed as upon the house-top. Then every aspersion will be wiped off, and every thing laid to their charge fully answered to their everlasting honour. Conscience will exult in the sentence; the innumerable company of angels will applaud; and Satan, that restless accuser of the brethren, will be for ever cast out. In a word: then their former sorrows shall fly away, their joy be full, and such as no creature can take from them.

Such is the comprehensive privilege of no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. After all, it is beyond description. Or, had I more eloquence than is in the angel's tongue to set it forth, it would be impossible in this state for mortals fully to apprehend it. Like Lot, when compelled by the angels to go out of Sodom, he perceived not the mercy of his deliverance, till he saw from the mountain whither he had fled, the dismal overthrow of the devoted cities of the plain, and their smoke ascending as a furnace. Just so, when the day of the Lord shall burn as an oven; when the many thousands of the redeemed shall stand on the King's right hand, and see from thence the terrible execution of the sentence, the wicked consuming like dross; then, and not till then, will they understand more perfectly the riches and extent of this privilege. Then the meaning of this passage will be fully known, and believed by all of that great assembly; "there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

A most comfortable privilege you will say; but are all partakers of it? They are not. Every son and daughter of Adam is condemned already for the breach of the first covenant, and, they are children of wrath, by nature, as well as by wicked practice; on that account, judgment has come on all men to condemnation. It is only those therefore, who receive the abundance of grace, and the gift of righteousness, that shall reign in life, by one Jesus Christ.

Or, in other words, the inestimable mercy of no condemnation belongs only to them that are in Christ Jesus, "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."—Which brings me forward,

II. To illustrate their character to whom this privilege of no condemnation does belong.—And upon this head I shall follow the description given of them, in the same order in which it is expressed in the text.

They "are in Christ Jesus." This phrase, frequent in holy writ, implies much more than being baptized into his name, or owning him as our Master in the external observance of his institutions. Many of this kind will be reprobated by him at the last day; but to them that are in Christ Jesus there is no condemnation. The former were baptized with water only, and not with the Holy Ghost. They have no communication with the stock of life, nor vital influences ministered to them; they are cumberers of the ground; at best they bear leaves only, and have no fruit to holiness. In point of external church privileges, their case seems to resemble that of Esau; who lay in the same womb with Jacob, was born and brought up in the same family, then the church of God, and marked with the same seal and sacrament of circumcision. But as Esau profanely sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; in like manner, many who were baptized into Christ, part with him and heaven, for the pleasures of sin, the gain and glory of the world; and thus being found despisers of grace, are finally cut off.—Let me observe,

That the expression, of being "in Christ Jesus," implies a real union with him, by faith unfeigned, and his Spirit dwelling in us. Holy scripture exhibits this in a variety of sensible images, by these to give us some idea of this oneness. There is scarce any way in which two things are said to be one, either in a natural or political sense, but inspiration has adopted it to represent this union, and confirm us in the belief of it. Thus, as the married pair are no more twain but one, so is Christ and the church. As the building stands upon the foundation, so are be-

lievers built up a spiritual house, founded upon that stone elect and precious, which God has laid in Zion. These, and many other similitudes that might be named, imply a relation very intimate and dear; especially that similitude of the vine and the branches, which our Saviour insists upon, more fully to express this mysterious union.

More particularly, we would consider the stock and root into which we are grafted; and that is no other than Christ Jesus, who calls himself the true Vine; by the apostle Paul he is called the true Olive, Rom. xi. 17; and, in the prophetic writings, the Root of Jesse, and the righteous Branch. When we had all died in Adam, and were as withered branches ripening for eternal fire, then in mercy God prepared this root as a stock of life, in which he would insert those whom he would bring to glory. Like all others of Adam's family, these branches were growing wild on the stock of corrupt nature, bearing no fruit but what was bitter and unsavoury, walking in the vanity of their minds, and estranged from God and the excellence of things divine: but being transplanted into the second Adam, who is a quickening Spirit, they have life from this root, and have it more abundantly. And now the barren wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and blossoms like the rose. It buds forth in holy desires after God, and conformity to him, a readiness and delight to do his will, and in all the fruits of righteousness to his praise. Thus they live, yet not they, but Christ liveth in them, as their righteousness, sanctification, and constant supply.

In fine: I would observe upon this branch of the subject, that though the nature of this union, and way of making it up, be much a secret, that is no good objection to its reality, and our believing it. Because it is mysterious, the pride of reason may puzzle and perplex, start difficulties, and treat this union as chimerical. But, before this mystery, so often mentioned in scripture, be discarded, let boasted reason explain to us the union between soul and body; how spirit acts upon matter, and thought so quickly puts it in motion: let reason tell us how the

bones grow in the womb of her that is with child; or how sound communicates our inward sentiments to one another. These, and many more that might be named, are facts of which no one entertains the least doubt; though, at the same time, as to the mode or manner, we have no conception. And if, in things within the sphere of nature, and sensible observation, there are difficulties which we cannot solve; shall we marvel, or deny the truth of supernatural things, which are more remote from our view, though attested by infallible authority?

Nor is this union more certain, than that the usual means of forming it are, what a thoughtless world calls the foolishness of preaching; accompanied always with a day of power. Then the secure sleeping soul is brought to consider. He is equally amazed at the danger of his condition, and his former vain confidence in it. He becomes thoughtful, weary of his present state, and anxious to get rid of it. At first, perhaps, he sees no evasion for him. Like Israel of old, with the Philistines before, and Assyrians behind, so is it sometimes with the sinner under strong convictions; hell, as it were naked before him, and the wrath of God treading at his heels. At length the door of mercy is seen, and the way to it through Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant. He repairs thither, resolved, that if he perish, he shall perish at the Redeemer's feet. Thus the soul comes out of itself, as it were, and is brought into Christ Jesus.

The last part of their character, to whom there is no condemnation, is their conversation in a present evil world: "They walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Which will be the subject of another discourse.—In the mean time, the reflections from what has been said are as follow.

1. From the connection between this verse, and the preceding chapter, we are led to observe, that the lot of the people of God, in this life, is not constant depression upon the one hand, nor uninterrupted triumph on the other, but something compounded of both. At one season, a seed-

time of tears; at another, an harvest of joy. To-day walking in the light of God's countenance, and beholding the face of their heavenly Father; by and by walking in darkness, and neither sun nor stars appearing to them.

In these vicissitudes, the Christian need not think that any strange thing befalls him. Consult the lives of worthies who have fought the good fight, and are now inheriting the promises, and we will find it to have been their case. It is to be expected in a militant state, and flows from these jarring principles in a justified person, the spirit lusting against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit. And in proportion to the prevalence of the one or other of these, his sorrows or consolations will abound. The best of saints have not escaped the trial, no nor the Holy One of God; who, in life, and in death, knew no corruption natural or moral, and yet experienced the hour and power of darkness. When, therefore, his followers meet with somewhat similar, let them not censure the ways of God, nor despond. It is not always his fortune to have a fair wind, who yet makes a prosperous voyage, and gets safely into the harbour.

2. Is there no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus? How inexpressibly strong are our obligations to him, through whom we receive this privilege? May not his name be very precious to you, the name of Jesus, who saves from the wrath to come? Ought not that life of yours, which he has so dearly ransomed, be wholly devoted to him? Though he has not as yet saved thine eyes from tears, nor secured thy feet altogether against falling; having delivered thy soul from death, the second death, shouldest not thou walk circumspectly before him in the land of the living?

3. Though there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, the apostle has not said, nor will any justified soul say, that there is no sin in him. While, therefore, you triumph in the one, let the remembrance of the other keep you humble. Articles of accusation could be easily framed, and as easily proved, ever since you were

brought into a justified state; articles sufficient to cast you out of the presence of God, and divorce you from him for ever. But his gifts and callings are all without repentance; and having glorified the head, he will not destroy the members. Correction for backslidings they shall receive; but, though chastened, they shall not be condemned with the world.

I do not speak thus to proclaim liberty to sin, or any indulgence in it. Sure I am, no gracious soul will so basely pervert this salutary doctrine, God forbid; but I mention it, to show how exceeding abundant the grace of the Redeemer is, and to encourage you in the conflict with your most secret and beloved lusts. For though these cannot so far prevail in a child of God, as utterly to destroy him; yet, if indulged, they will break his bones. Though they cannot succeed so far as to cast him into the infernal prison; yet they may kindle an hell in his bosom, from the bitter remorse of an awakened conscience.

4. If there be no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, then there is nothing but condemnation to them that are out of him. Thou art condemned as a transgressor by the holy law of God, and likewise by the gospel which thou hast despised; and conscience, hadst thou ears to hear, announces the sentence: this is a threefold cord which is not easily broken; a cord to many, it is to be feared, like the chain by which the fallen angels are bound over to the judgment of the great day. Possibly thou art crying, Peace, peace to thyself, though thou be walking after the imagination of thine own heart, adding drunkenness to thirst. But whence all this quiet, when such dangers threaten? Only from shutting thine eyes, and fatally putting the evil day far off. And canst thou indeed believe, that banishing it from thy thoughts will put it out of being? Whether thou sleep or wake, be sober or beside thyself, that day lingereth not, nor thy damnation with it.

What meanest thou, O sleeper! Methinks what thou hast heard of this condemnation may be feet to the lame,

or as wings to make thee fly to the Saviour, as the hope set before thee; may take rest from thine eyes, and slumber from thine eyelids, till thou find a sanctuary in him, a hiding-place from the storm. For thy soul's sake do not tarry. Be speedy in this most important concern. What wouldest thou say, upon seeing prisoners under sentence of death sporting with their irons to-day, when to-morrow they are to be led forth to execution? But it is an object unspeakably more shocking, to see careless sinners walking in the sight of their eyes, and ways of their own incorrigible heart, when, at the same time, the wrath of God is abiding on them, and eternal perdition is standing at the door.

5. As they only escape this condemnation who are in Christ Jesus; conclude not hastily, nor without impartial examination, that this is your state. With respect to too many, they never called it in question, nor bestowed a serious thought upon the subject. It is enough to others, that they are called by the Christian name; though they have not put on Christ, nor are baptized with his Spirit; though they never had that holy thing, his image, formed in them. Thus they have the name, but are destitute of the nature. Of this character our Saviour speaks, John xv. 2. "Every branch in me," says Christ, in him by profession only, "that beareth not fruit, the husbandman taketh away." They are lopped off as barren and hurtful. By the fruit, therefore, may the vital vegetative connection with the true vine be known. The change is substantially the same in all who are in Christ Jesus; the circumstances preparatory to, or attending the change, are various. In some instantaneous almost and gentle; in others more gradual, and with sharper pangs of the new birth. And who is it will prescribe to him in these operations, or be so presumptuous as to find fault?

SERMON VIII.

THE BLESSEDNESS AND CHARACTER OF JUSTIFIED PERSONS.

ROM. viii. 1.—“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

HAVING discoursed of this privilege of “no condemnation,” and of their state who have a title to it, to wit, they “are in Christ Jesus;” I proceed to illustrate the remaining part of their character as exhibited in this text.

They “walk not after the flesh.” By ‘flesh’ I understood the corrupted nature in which we were born, derived to us from Adam, which is totally repugnant to the most holy nature and will of God. Among other names given it in Scripture, it is called by the significant one of “a body of death;” intimating, that as its operations are killing in the issue, so, like the natural body, it has many members. But they that are in Christ Jesus have put off all these,—are purged from them, and have disclaimed their jurisdiction.

1. They walk not after the lust of the eye, or are not under the dominion of covetousness. To a carnal man, his fortune and wealth, his gold and silver are the supreme good, and the idols which he worships; setting his whole heart upon them, and “saying to the gold, Thou art my hope; and to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence.” His thirst for these is unquenchable,—his endeavours to obtain them unremitting,—and he is saving and sordid in the use of them, neglecting what he owes to God and man in the works of piety and charity.

But they that are in Christ Jesus do not thus walk after this idol, or fall down before it. I do not mean that the Christian is a sluggard or idle. No. Such are the bane and burden of society. He is diligent in his affairs; and, when successful, he is thankful for the blessings and bounty of providence. But he seeks not these in the first place. That pre-eminence he gives to God, and therefore can willingly give up with them all for his sake, and heavenly treasures. In a word, he does not so walk after a portion in this life, as to neglect the other, or go a-whoring from his God.

2. He walks not after the flesh in the common and foulest sense of the word,—I mean in intemperance, which often go hand in hand. A course of this kind has such a notorious turpitude in it, is so defiling to the soul, and defamatory to the name, that his reason and renewed nature remonstrate and abhor it. While the sensualist moves in the degrading and destructive circle of his cups of excess, and filthy pleasures—the impurities of the night succeeding the debauch of the day—these are not the walks where you will find the man that is in Christ Jesus. He has no fellowship with these unfruitful works of darkness. Sobriety and chastity are amiable virtues in his esteem. He considers his body as a consecrated temple to the Lord; and that to defile it would be more criminal in him than Belshazzar's profanity, who, when entertaining his lords and concubines, caused bring the vessels of the house of the Lord, that they might riot and drink out of them.

3. He walks not in the pride of life. This is another branch of corrupt nature, or member of the body of death, by which many are enslaved. They are puffed up with a high conceit of their own excellencies; and think that these qualify them to shine and be observed in the world, like the natural sun in the firmament, whose brightness darkens the stars around him. Their passion for applause and fame, superiority to others, and testimonies of respect, is ardent. Of these they can never have enough. If these

are withheld in any instance, the proud man is enraged at a blind or invidious world, which does not see his worth, or has not candour to acknowledge it.

The reverse of this character is his temper and walk, who is in Christ Jesus. Sensible that he is vanity in himself, polluted in his nature, provoking in his conduct, and that many evils compass him about, his heart is not haughty nor his eyes lofty. Conscious that the divine benignity to him has been unmerited and free, he walks humbly with God. Far from being puffed up with his wealth, or the world's applause, with his knowledge, or any endowments which he is possessed of, he esteems more highly the honour that comes of God; and his inward sentiments are, "I have nothing but what I have received, and by the grace of God I am what I am." Thus glorying only in the Lord, and putting no confidence in the flesh, he rejoices in Christ Jesus, in whom alone he has righteousness and strength.

To say no more upon this head, in his deportment toward others he studies to "do nothing through strife or vain-glory." And, "putting away all anger, malice, hypocrisy, and evil-speaking, in lowliness of mind he prefers, and"—impressed deeply with his own defects—"he esteems others better than himself."

We come now to the conclusion of their character to whom there is no condemnation:—they "walk after the Spirit." From which words I shall consider the principle,—the rule,—and some of the properties of this their walk.

The principle of their walk is called the "Spirit." By this we are not to understand that inspiration of the Almighty which enabled prophets and apostles, and other holy men of God, unerringly to deliver his mind to the church. Modern pretences by Quietists and others to that kind of spirit, cannot justly claim belief, as these disparage the perfection of holy Scripture, and open a door to any delusion.

1. By the 'Spirit,' here, I understand the Holy Ghost himself, the third person of the adorable Trinity. He is

that to the soul which the soul is to the body,—the fountain of its sense, motion, and activity. There are expressions in the word of God which would incline one to think, that, by giving the Spirit to believers, something more is meant than either his miraculous gifts or sanctifying graces, even himself. Thus he is said to dwell in them, and they are called his temples,—as if he inhabited these as the shekinah resided in Solomon's temple. Be that as it will, I observe,

2. That the Spirit is the principle of the Christian's walk, as he infuses those holy dispositions which are the seed and spring of a new life in the soul. Prior to this, the sinner was destitute of spiritual sense and motion; and the state of the soul not unlike the chaos in the infancy of our earth, when all was darkness and disorder:—but as the operation of the Spirit then produced the life of animal nature; just so, it is his powerful agency still that produces the life of grace in those who were dead in trespasses and sins. When scattered about the grave's mouth, or rather lying in it, he visits the soul, inspires the breath and flame of heaven to animate and warm the cold heart. It is on account of this good work, that he is so frequently in Scripture called "holy." This title has not such immediate respect to his nature, as to his office and operations in sanctifying his people.

3. He is the principle of their walk, in respect of these gracious fruits, or parts of the Christian temper in them, of which he is the author. The former operation of the Spirit infusing life, is as it were the root; the latter are the branches that spring from it. They constitute the new man, and his members are complete, not one is wanting. In their exercise, indeed, they are not equally illustrious in the children of God. An Abraham is more eminent in faith than any. Moses is conspicuous in mildness of spirit; David in devotion; Job in patience; Daniel, and the three Hebrew captives, in resolution and fortitude; Paul in fervency of love and zeal for his divine Master. Nor are these various graces alike vigorous at all times in

the same soul; but the seeds of them are all planted there, —they are the springs of action, and have an influence less or more upon the Christian's walk.

4. Another source and principle of this walk is the Spirit in his quickening power and energy. This is something distinct from any of the former. The divine life, or truth of grace, may be in a soul, where it is very dormant and languid. Hence are these requests of the Psalmist; "Quicken me, incline mine heart;" and the prayer of the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith!" Have not the children of God known the unhappy seasons, when there remained little or no spirit in them for duty, or readiness to the good work? When they had little relish of divine things, could scarcely open their mouths in prayer, and had no ear to hear the word of God? In that decayed condition, He who first infused the principle of life, and planted the immortal seed, is as the dew of heaven to make it revive, exert itself, and flourish. In his former work of quickening souls when dead, he was the sole efficient cause. In this they are workers together with him; for these renewed and seasonable supplies of grace are not bestowed upon them in vain. "I will put my Spirit within them," says God; and not that only, but "I will cause them to walk in my ways."

Thus much for the principle of their walk who are in Christ Jesus. Let us now consider the rule of it.

1. The rule of their walk is not the pernicious maxims of the world, nor the customs dictated by dissipation, folly, and madness. Far from affecting singularity, the Christian can accommodate himself to innocent modes of dress and behaviour; and thinks it his duty to be agreeable to all, for their good with whom he converses. But he cannot subject his holy profession to the times, nor his practice to the humours of every company he falls in with. "Be not conformed to the world," says Paul, Rom. xii. 2. He who submits to the judgment of the world, for the truth of his religion, the purity of his morals, or knowledge of the ways and laws of God, will find himself deceived in

the issue. Nor are the decisions of any man, or society of men, his rule, however respectable they may be for wisdom and sanctity,—they are fallible;—the best have erred;—and, in following them implicitly, we may be misled. Therefore,

2. The rule of their walk is the word and testimony of Jesus,—the word of the living God, their King, their Law-giver, and Judge. This is the standard of our faith and duty, as it will be of our judgment in the great day of decision. As many, therefore, as walk after the Spirit, walk likewise according to this rule. Betwixt these two there is perfect harmony; the written word being truly the mind of the Spirit, and what he saith to the churches. If an angel from heaven speak not according to it, he is not to be heard; nor any pretended revelations from the Spirit.

I proceed now to mention some things peculiar to this walk after the Spirit, and characteristic of the Christian's course heavenward.

1. It is not without difficulty and danger. He is militant in every step of it. The body of death, remains of which are in the best, is a mighty incumbrance; it not only retards, but it also exerts all its malignity and strength to oppose the Christian and turn him back. "I find then a law," said one of the holiest of mere men, "that when I would do good, evil is present with me," Rom. vii. 21. This is our bosom foe. A foe from which we can neither fly nor altogether put him to flight. While dwelling in houses of clay, he will cleave to us as a girdle to the loins of a man. In full concert with other enemies without us, the conflict is perilous and without intermission, till death, friendly death, put an end to the painful contest. Notwithstanding these difficulties,

2. This walk after the Spirit is, of all others, the most comfortable. It is walking in the light, in the knowledge of supernatural and divine things, which are delightful, and impressive of their own image upon the soul. In this light the heirs of salvation know their way, and whither

they are going. Their obedience is unconstrained, except from love,—it is spontaneous and free. “I walk at liberty,” says David, “for I seek thy precepts,” Psal. cxix. 45. The way itself is pleasantness and peace; and nothing can be more desirable than the company they find in it. As is said of Enoch, they walk with God; so that they are never alone, a heavenly Father is with them. In this way they have the Spirit itself, who sometimes whispers their adoption. They have angels to keep them in the way, and the testimony of conscience as a source of joy. In few words—here the redeemed of the Lord do walk, and are fellow-travellers to the heavenly Zion. Here may be seen the footsteps of all who have gone before them to glory.

3. They are progressive. And so much is implied in the metaphor of walking; which is a bodily motion, and gradual remove from one place to another. Agreeably to this, in walking after the Spirit, there is a departure from ourselves, to draw near to God, and be entirely devoted to him; the heart removes from trust in itself, to dependence upon the Saviour; from sin to holiness; from setting the affections on things of this earth, to seek the better and heavenly country. Thus they go from strength to strength. Their faith increases in vigour; their love is more ardent; their hope becomes more stable; and in the fruits of righteousness they increase daily. In this manner they press forward. Not but they meet with obstructions to stop their progress, or temptations to turn them aside into crooked paths; but they cannot continue, or, like the wicked, walk on in these. Nay, by their falls they are taught humility and vigilance, more earnestness at a throne of grace, and to quicken their pace for the future.

4. They are uniform in walking after the Spirit. There is a great difference betwixt accidentally stepping into a road for a little, and walking or habitually treading in it. Saul was once found among the prophets, and prophesied too; yet he seems to have been a stranger to the Spirit of holiness. An Ahab occasionally humbled himself, but that

was not his way—being destitute of the truly contrite heart. Thus, in the motley character of many, some things are like a saint; much more about them is like the slave of sin. One step, in appearance, is in the road of their holy calling; but their more usual way is according to the course of this world. Their religion is like a season bird, seen only at certain times; and, like their clothes, is changed or laid aside, as suits the times and company they converse with.

It is not so with them that walk after the Spirit. Their conversation is more of a piece. They walk with wisdom at home in a perfect way, and with wisdom toward them that are without. They are in the fear of God all the day long, and habitually through every day of life. Gross deviations there are sometimes from the right way, like those of David and Peter; but these are no more sufficient to conclude them walkers after the flesh, than the baptism of Simon Magus, and his mingling with the disciples for some time, were sufficient to denominate him a child of God.

5. They persevere in this course. Their path is as the light of the morning sun, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day; and that is the sure end and termination of their walk. It is true, that there have been in every age who have fallen from a high profession, and turned aside from the holy commandment once delivered to them. That, however, is no evidence that the immortal seed is corruptible, and will utterly decay, but a clear proof that it was never sown in the heart. In a state of innocence, the divine life was lost, as was the case with Adam. And however vigorous it may be in any saint upon earth, without renewed supplies of strength it would decay and fail. But the Spirit after whom they walk is a perennial, refreshing spring. He first infused grace; he cherishes and makes it grow. Therefore, though an innocent man could be seduced, sin, and die; he that is born of the Spirit, and walks after the Spirit, cannot sin unto death.

Thus the mercy that prevented the sinner in effectual calling, crowns him with perseverance.

I shall now conclude with some practical improvement.

1. Let me call upon you once more, to prove your own selves, what manner of spirit you are of; or what is the ruling principle of your thoughts, purposes, affections, and daily walk. Think not that you are in Christ Jesus because you are in visible communion with his church, and enjoy the privileges of it; for they are not all Israel that are of Israel. As, in the ark, there was an accursed Ham and a blessed Shem,—as, in the family of Christ, there was a treacherous Judas and a beloved John,—so, in his church, there is a mixed multitude;—many pretending to be the sons of God, who belong not to the adoption.

In some the spirit of slumber does prevail, which has closed their eyes. With regard to eternal concerns they are in a deep sleep, dreaming of peace and safety when destruction is at hand. In others, a sensual and worldly spirit reigns. They have a heart for nothing but animal gratifications, or the perishing gain and glory of a present life. In some the evil spirit presides—I mean the god of this world, who is said to work in the children of disobedience. A spirit that lusteth to envy, resentment, and wrath, malice and mischief of every kind.

Be not deceived; they that are Christ's, to whom there is no condemnation, have put off all these. Instead of walking after them, they have crucified these vile affections, and maintain a daily conflict with every lust that wars against the soul. If at any time they are decoyed and enticed to serve them, it is such service as Israel gave Pharaoh in Egypt, involuntary and reluctant, attended with trouble and anguish. But to assist you further in this important inquiry, consider,

2. If you are walking after the Spirit, and not after the flesh, he is in you a good Spirit. He illuminates the mind, and inclines the heart, exciting to the exercise of these good dispositions which he has planted in you. For, as

Christ and his Spirit are inseparable, just so the Spirit and his fruits cannot be asunder. Where this Spirit dwells, there, in a special manner, is supreme love to God, the perfection of beauty, and delight in him; there will be love unfeigned, love to his children and family, and great good-will to our fellow-men; relieving their miseries, pitying their infirmities, and their follies too, and seeking their good always.

Once more:—if you are walking after the Spirit, he is in you a spirit of prayer. Under his influence, the soul can no more live without this duty than the natural life can continue without breathing. Nor is it merely the external performance of the duty that is intended. No. The heart will be engaged in it. There will be fervour as well as frequency,—filial confidence through a Mediator, and unfainting perseverance. Are these the fruits of the Spirit in your temper and walk?—then permit me to offer these few directions.

1. Follow this guide still. Follow the light and admonitions of his blessed word—there you have his counsel and his will—and quench not his motions upon the heart. O beware of self-sufficiency, dependence upon your own wisdom, righteousness, and strength, that stumbling-block which has overthrown, wounded, and ruined many. Never forget it, that you could not begin, and cannot continue in well-doing, without this Holy Spirit; that the rise, progress, and perfection of grace in the soul, are all from his powerful agency. He is the immediate author of the work of faith in you, and the labour of love, and patience of hope; and the finisher of these too. If we vex and rebel against him,—if we refuse his hand and conduct,—we shall quickly wander, and weary ourselves in the ways of sin. Hence is that prayer of David: “Thy Spirit is good, lead me to the land of uprightness,” *Psal. cxliii. 10.*

2. Take heed to the way, the narrow way, which leads to the heavenly Zion, that you keep in it. There are so many by-paths in this state, to confound and mislead the traveller, that strict inquiry and attention are necessary.

“Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see. Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls,” Jer. vi. 16. The way of God’s testimonies is the good old path in which the children of God have walked from the beginning till now. Search the divine record, and frequently examine your course by it. When satisfied that you are walking in the truth, and not in any false and crooked way, you will go on comfortably. “I am the way,” says Christ;—abide in him,—and see that ye “walk circumspectly,” with exactness and accuracy, as the word signifies. Ponder the path of your goings well, as there are snares on every hand; and our way is infested by enemies malicious and artful, to intercept us in our journey, and rob us of our most precious treasure. But let it animate you to vigilance and constancy,

3. That your guide and leader is both wise and mighty. He knows well your way, your weakness, and your dangers; and he has an arm that is full of power. He guides his meek and lowly followers, and teaches them his way. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. He can extricate from any snare. Gates of brass, and bars of iron, or the most formidable obstructions, are broke asunder by him.—Thus, in journeying to the celestial Canaan, every mountain shall be brought low before the heirs of salvation; every valley shall be filled up, and rough places become smooth; yea, the swelling waters of affliction must divide, that the ransomed of the Lord may pass through, and be brought to the inheritance which he has prepared for them.

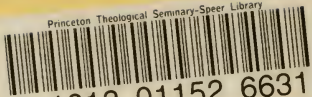
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